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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Pamela Erickson 503-244-5211 or
Steve Brinkhoff 503-449-1495

Six organizations cooperate to reduce alcohol sales to youth

This week, 14 teams of police officers, inspectors with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and youth decoys fanned out across Multnomah County to conduct compliance checks of grocery stores, bars and taverns that sell alcohol. Of 141 premises visited by the teams, 38 sold alcohol to the youths. That equates to a 28% illegal sale rate.

It was the first operation of a countywide team that includes the Portland Police Bureau, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, Gresham Police Department, Fairview Police Department, Troutdale Police Department and the Oregon Liquor Control Commission.

The operation began at noon Wednesday with over 50 officers, youths and OLCC inspectors assembled at the Portland Police Bureau's East Precinct to receive instructions and assignments. All premises were selected at random. Decoy operations are conducted carefully so as to be a fair test of licensees' practices.

"This is one of the largest--and certainly the most complex--decoy operation ever conducted in our state," said Pamela Erickson, deputy director of Oregon Partnership, a nonprofit alcohol and other drug prevention organization that organized the task force under a grant from the Oregon Department of Human Services. "It took an enormous amount of organization and cooperation from all departments. All involved should be exceptionally proud of their excellent efforts."

The team will conduct future operations on a regular basis throughout the year. Compliance checks are a proven method to reduce sales of alcohol to underage drinkers. According to Steve Pharo, interim director of the OLCC, "OLCC has worked with local law enforcement in many parts of the state to improve retailers' compliance with liquor laws. These programs are most effective when they involve all law enforcement agencies in an area. This cooperative venture is just a huge plus for Multnomah County."

Underage drinking is a major health and safety problem in Oregon, with nearly a third of Oregon eighth graders reporting alcohol use in the past month, and 45% of 11th-graders reporting alcohol use. Alcohol use is associated with the leading causes of death of our young people. According to the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, underage drinking costs Oregonians \$697 million a year in medical costs, pain and suffering, and work loss costs. Youth who start drinking before age 15 are four times as likely to become addicted as adults vs. those who wait until age 21.

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