

New state law means lower threshold for prosecuting teens for 'minor in possession'

If teenagers have parties with alcohol, it will now take more than tossing the beer out of their hands to evade arrest.

A new state law takes effect today that will lower the burden of proof to prosecute "minor in possession" crimes.

Law enforcement officers will be able to use their professional judgment to deduce whether a minor is "visibly intoxicated" if they smell alcohol on his breath, according to the new state statute.

So the charge of minor in possession could still come, if a teen has such indicators as slurred speech, uneven gait, bloodshot eyes or field sobriety test of .02.

Local arrests and charges are expected to increase.

Cole County Prosecuting Attorney Bill Tackett said he will "push the envelope" with even close cases.

Representatives from the Cole County Sheriff's office, Jefferson City Police Department, Missouri State Highway Patrol and the Prenger Juvenile Attention Center have reviewed what information is needed to prove impairment, Tackett said.

And parents should be warned, if their teen is convicted, they must attend the alcohol awareness classes and victim impact panels too.

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