Ordinance on Unruly Gatherings  
#20504

What is it?
The Ordinance on Unruly Gatherings (often referred to as the Social Host Ordinance) is a NEW law for the City of Eugene. It holds individuals (social hosts) criminally responsible for hosting or allowing an unruly event or social gathering (party). The property owners will also be penalized if there are multiple occurrences at the same property.  (Ordinance #20504)

What is an “unruly” gathering?
The ordinance defines an unruly gathering as a party or gathering at the property where alcohol is served or consumed, and where any two or more of the following occurs:

- violation of state or City of Eugene laws relating to sale, service, possession or consumption of alcoholic liquor, including minor in possession and serving alcohol to minors;
- disorderly conduct, noise disturbance, criminal mischief, public urination or defecation, littering, assault, menacing, harassment, or intimidation.

What are the penalties for violating the law?
Violators will be issued citations of up to $1,000, and repeat offenders will also have to pay for police, fire, and emergency response, and repair costs for damage to public property. The courts determine the actual fines, and usually consider various factors including the presence or lack of prior violations.

Property owners will be notified of unruly gatherings on their property. If an unruly gathering occurs at the same property more than three times in a twelve-month period, the owner of the property is liable for response cost.

How can it impact students?
Students who host parties within the Eugene city limits would be subject to the ordinance on unruly gatherings if they are involved in hosting or promoting parties that become unruly. Under this ordinance, the social host does not have to be present at the unruly gathering, event or gathering to be criminally responsible if determined he or she had a significant role in organizing and/or promoting the party.

What steps should you take to be a responsible and legal social host?
Party hosts can take steps to protect guests, themselves and others to reduce exposure to alcohol-related legal liability. If you are hosting a party where individuals under the age of 21 years may be present, you should:

1. Verify the age of the guests.
2. Control access to alcohol.
3. Control the quantity of alcohol.
4. Get to know your neighbors, exchange phone numbers and communicate before you have people over.
5. Be courteous to neighbors and keep party noise down.
6. Refuse entrance to uninvited guests, especially ones who arrive with alcohol or who are already intoxicated.
7. Call the Eugene Police Department for assistance with uninvited guests (541-682-5111, or in an emergency, 9-1-1). See next question.
8. Avoid advertising parties using Facebook or other forms of unrestricted social media. People can easily share party information and attract a crowd that is unsafe and unmanageable.
What can you do if a party gets out of control?
If you host a party that becomes “unruly” and you are unsuccessful in asking guests to leave or to stop their illegal behaviors, you can call Eugene Police for help (541-682-5111, or in emergencies 9-1-1). Police and courts will favorably consider social hosts who make a good-faith effort to break up unruly gatherings. It is important to understand that the new ordinance specifically includes an “affirmative defense” to those who ask for law enforcement help in shutting down an unruly gathering. In other words, those who ask for help are much less likely to be cited for or be assessed a large fine in court for hosting an unruly gathering.

Does the ordinance outlaw parties?
No. The ordinance provides fines and accountability for ILLEGAL activity that happens during some parties. It is worded carefully to target chronic offenders whose guests break laws, disturb neighbors, damage property and jeopardize people’s safety.

When does the ordinance take effect?
On January 28, 2013, the City Council voted unanimously to approve the ordinance. The Ordinance on Unruly Gatherings (Ordinance No. 20504) goes into effect on March 2, 2013. Eugene Police Department will educate violators through April 1, 2013 and will begin enforcement effective April 2, 2013.

Why has the City of Eugene enacted this law?
Oversize, disorderly gatherings and parties involving alcohol have been a continuing problem. They disturb neighbors' peace, damage property, create unsafe conditions, tend to attract criminal conduct, and necessitate costly police response. The number of loud party complaints received and criminal citations issued for noise and alcohol-related violations are trending steadily upward, indicating that existing laws have not been effective deterrents.

Neighborhood groups, property owners, residents, the University of Oregon, Lane County, and the City of Eugene have worked together as part of a Neighborhood Livability Working Group to suggest ways to help change unlawful and disruptive parties and gatherings, including consideration of a social host ordinance that holds those who host parties and property owners accountable. The ordinance does not target a particular group of people and applies equally to anyone in Eugene.

Where can you get more information or read the full ordinance?
A copy of the ordinance can be found on the City of Eugene website.