

## WHY DO THESE PROBLEMS EXIST IN YELLOWSTONE COUNTY?

Three specific reasons for excessive DUIs have been identified. For each of these, the task force has drilled down to identify more specifically why these conditions exist in Yellowstone County.

### REASON 1: Availability of drugs and community acceptance of alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drug abuse.

- **AVAILABILITY:** it is well documented in research that as perceived and actual availability of alcohol and drugs increases, prevalence of use also increases. As prevalence of use increases, the risk of DUI increases. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an increase in miles traveled leads to increased problems on the roadways including alcohol/drug related incidents. Montana has experienced a slow steady increase of vehicle miles travelled over the past thirty years. In Yellowstone County, as in the rest of Montana, public transportation is by and large unavailable, especially on evenings and weekends, when the majority of DUIs occur. This factor, combined with availability, exacerbate the problem of DUIs in Yellowstone County.

Alcohol and drugs are easy to get in Yellowstone County, as documented below.

1. 68% of youth surveyed in Yellowstone County in 2008 say alcohol is sort of easy or very easy to get. 64% say the same about marijuana. Over one-fifth of youth (22%) say even hard drugs like cocaine, LSD or amphetamines would be sort of easy or very easy to get<sup>9</sup>.
2. Medical marijuana businesses have mushroomed in Billings over the past year, growing from a few businesses that were not highly visible, to over eighty with many highly visible storefronts close to schools and in high-traffic business areas. There are currently 222 registered caregivers in Yellowstone County and 981 patients who can legally use marijuana (even though they cannot legally drive under the influence)<sup>10</sup>. Since marijuana is the cause of 44% of all drugged driving incidents in Montana<sup>11</sup>, and marijuana-related DUIs are increasing in the state<sup>12</sup>, the increased availability through medicinal marijuana is likely to increase the problems related to DUI. Indeed the majority of drugged driving incidents (60%) are not caused by illegal drugs, but substances which are legal when prescribed<sup>13</sup>.
3. Illegal marijuana is also readily available in Montana. In 2008, the DEA seized 4.1 kgs of cocaine, no heroine, 2.7 kgs of methamphetamine, and 224.2 kgs of marijuana<sup>14</sup>.
4. Like many other communities, Yellowstone County is experiencing a growth in prescription drug abuse. In a recent take-back event hosted by the Billings Police Department, over 200 pounds of prescription drugs were taken in at one pharmacy in the Billings Heights in a period of just a few hours. This is the first take-back event in Billings and surprised everyone involved with the high volume of drugs turned in. This underscores the availability of prescription drugs (from a source other than a pharmacy) to both youth and adults. As mentioned above, 60% of drugged driving

<sup>9</sup> 2008 Montana Prevention Needs Assessment, Yellowstone County Report

<sup>10</sup> Montana's Medical Marijuana Act: Emerging Issues. Prepared by Sue O'Connell for the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee April 2010

<sup>11</sup> Overview of Montana's Impaired Driving Problem. Montana Department of Transportation. Downloaded May 2010 from [www.mdt.mt.gov/safety/docs/impaired\\_driving\\_prg\\_overview.pdf](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/safety/docs/impaired_driving_prg_overview.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> DEA State Fact Sheets: Montana 2008. Accessed at [http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/state\\_factsheets/montana.html](http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/state_factsheets/montana.html)