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Students take a stand against binge drinking

Morin, Annie

Intent on upholding their image and shaken by the deaths of two young binge drinkers, students are now the first to speak out against the drinking games that used to be popular.

The 2001 death of Alexandre Rail-Vaillancourt, who became intoxicated after drinking 30 ounces of alcohol in 30 seconds in a bar in Limoilou, and that of Dany Tremblay, who was found frozen to death after taking part in a drinking contest at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC) bar in 2003, are forever etched in public memory.

At Université Laval, the Confédération des associations d'étudiants de l'Université Laval (CADEUL) is taking great strides this year to avoid such incidents.

Student associations and initiation organizers will be informed in the coming days that binge drinking is prohibited. Posters will be put up all over the campus in preparation for the return to classes on September 6. At the Pub and the Grand salon, two bars that are managed by the CADEUL, binge drinking will not be tolerated. For a first offence, violators will receive a warning, and for a second offence, they will be expelled.

"We want to avoid a horror story like the one that unfolded in Chicoutimi at all costs," explained Olivier Poulin, vice-president of communications for the student association.

It is also important to note that last year, a biology student filed a complaint about having consumed alcohol against her will during an off-campus initiation activity. She and her mother raised a commotion among the media, accusing Université Laval and student groups of failing in their duties. Their efforts paid off. "It's the kind of publicity that we don't need. It leaves a bad impression of students and their return to classes", Poulin explained.

Cegeps (General and vocational colleges)

At cegeps also, the time has come to promote prevention, with student associations being the first to jump on board. The measures adopted in recent years include setting a maximum quantity of beer available for sale; establishing a minimum selling price; good behaviour contracts signed by the organizers of licensed events; and drive-home programs.

At Cégep de Sainte-Foy, the administration has gone so far as to end parties at 11:00 p.m. Students also have their own ideas. "There have been times when we've slipped alcohol-free beer to inebriated students without them even knowing it," explained Mireille Grenier, administrative assistant for the Collège FX-Garneau student association.

But it is also important to be very careful: "It's important to increase awareness before young people start drinking. Once they've had a beer in their hand it's often too late," emphasized France Desbiens, community worker at the same Cegep.

According to Dr. René Blais, director general of the Poison Control Centre, this is true, because "once they are under the influence, people have fewer inhibitions, and they develop a heightened thirst for risk". This is what makes binge drinking contests so appealing.

Dr. Blais has his doubts about the impact of death in this context. "It is very difficult to influence the thought processes of youths."

And here he is, explaining how, during the coroner's inquest into the death of the young Rail-Vaillancourt, that an emergency room colleague at Hôtel-Dieu de Lévis was confronted with an unconscious and intoxicated young person who was in a state of hypothermia. To prevent him from choking on his own vomit, his friends had placed him outside on a balcony and had forgotten him there one frigid night. One of them had to sober up before driving him to the hospital. This story is similar to the two previous ones however it did have a happier ending.

The director general of Éduc'Alcool, Hubert Sacy, is pleased that the first campaign to fight binge drinking

introduced last year is making some headway. He refuses, however, to rest on his laurels. "We are still as effective as our last campaign." The organization is back in the driver's seat this year with a clear goal: to eliminate binge drinking and binge drinkers. The new advertisement shows a pyramid of empty shot glasses with the slogan "may the dumbest drinker win" (courtesy translation).

"We don't want to preach, and we don't want to scare people, but we need to get the message across that binge drinking is stupid, plain and simple," Sacy emphasized.

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Ecstasy appears to have claimed a victim in Québec City

Néron, Jean-François  
Le Soleil

Québec City - A young Québec woman aged 25 died yesterday after allegedly taking ecstasy, a trendy synthetic drug that is often associated with the emergence of the techno music culture and rave parties. If the autopsy confirms this suspicion, it will be the second such death in Québec in a little over a month.

A call to 9-1-1 at around 8:30 a.m. summoned police officers and ambulance technicians to 1367 Émilien-Rochette St. in Ancienne-Lorette. Inside the second-story apartment, emergency workers found the 25-year-old woman and a man, also believed to be in his mid-twenties. "On the telephone, the man said that the woman was not well at all", explained Jean-Sébastien Roy of the Québec police.

The man's claim was in fact an understatement: the woman was in respiratory distress when emergency workers arrived. According to police, this allegedly occurred further to her having ingested a synthetic drug believed to be ecstasy sometime during the night.

"The ambulance technicians immediately began cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) which they continued during transport. Unfortunately, the young woman was declared dead at the hospital," added police spokesperson, François Bouchard.

According to the initial details that were released, the man, who lives at the apartment where the incident unfolded, met the deceased woman on the Sunday evening at a bar in the Québec City region. They apparently ended the night at his home however police refused to confirm this later in the day.

The man is currently considered to be a key witness. At first sight, it appeared that foul play was not involved. The owner of the building who lives on the main floor only learned the devastating news in the morning. In her opinion, her tenant is "a quiet, hard-working guy who has lived here for a little more than a year."

In the hot seat

On February 6, a 13-year old girl from Rigaud died after taking ecstasy. The 16-year-old boy who sold it to her was convicted for drug trafficking.

On February 8, Québec police seized \$25,000 worth of drugs including 1,600 speed and ecstasy pills at a Place Duval apartment in the Limoilou District.

On February 25, two sisters aged 19 and 22 became intoxicated against their will with what was believed to be GHB, also known as the "rape drug". One of the sisters was sexually molested and was left half-naked in an industrial park in Charlesbourg.

All of these unfortunate events lead to the belief that little is known about the dangers of synthetic drugs, including ecstasy. A study published in 2004 based on samples seized in Québec revealed that 35 per cent of the ecstasy and speed pills that were analyzed contained between two and seven different substances. The dose of each substance also varied significantly. As a result, consumers are not necessarily taking what they think they are buying. The cocktail is a dangerous one.

"Despite the seizures, it is still easy to obtain these drugs," François Bouchard admitted. He added: "and what is most unfortunate is that people take them without questioning the dangers." Police are attempting to better inform young people about the risks involved with taking drugs as early as grades five and six in elementary school, and hold prevention sessions at the schools.

The identity of yesterday's victim should be known later today as soon as the immediate family has been notified. An autopsy and toxicity analysis will make it possible to confirm without a doubt that ecstasy was involved.

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La Une, Friday, April 21, 2006, p. A1

The SAAQ is running out of ways to emphasize caution among young people

Fleury, Élisabeth

The Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ) is running low on ideas for encouraging safe driving among young people. According to road safety vice-president, Johanne St-Cyr, young drivers remain particularly difficult to sensitize.

"The problem with young people is that they take risks and they lack experience. We target advertisements towards them, but it's difficult to get through to them. We've even tried Internet advertisements and campaigns in movie theatres. The problem is that young people are saturated with information!" explained Johanne St-Cyr during an interview with LE SOLEIL yesterday. Mrs. St-Cyr chose to not comment on the tragedy in Daveluyville in which three young people lost their lives. The driver, Sébastien Couture, aged 21, has been formally charged with impaired driving causing the deaths of his three friends. Among circles surrounding the victims and the accused, the incident was referred to as an "accident", thereby reducing the dramatic aspect of the tragedy.

"Generally speaking, all accidents are avoidable. We need to stop referring to traffic accidents as mere

deaths. If 600 people died each year in train or airplane accidents, we'd do something about it, wouldn't we?" St-Cyr added.

In 2003, there were 621 deaths on Québec roads. Alcohol was a factor in 30 per cent of these cases. While young people under the age of 24 represent only 10 per cent of all drivers, they also represented 33 per cent of those who died with blood alcohol levels above 0.08 mg. From 1999 to 2003, no fewer than 535 young people aged 16 to 24 died as a result of drunk driving in Québec.

The SAAQ does not yet know if it will use the video in which the young Adam Rousseau was filmed drunk behind the wheel immediately before the impact that killed his two friends in Richmond in February 2005 for an awareness campaign. In 2000, the SAAQ received exclusive authorization from the parents of Mathieu Perron, a 19-year-old whose death at the wheel of his car that was driving at speeds in excess of 200 km/h was filmed by his friends, to use the video for educational purposes. It was turned into a poignant advertisement.

Although statistics show that the number of accidents involving new drivers has been declining since the SAAQ introduced its **gradual access to driving program** in 1997, a great deal of work remains to be done. "The question we are now asking ourselves is: What more can we do to improve the driving records of young people?" ventured Mrs. St-Cyr.

The SAAQ said that it is exploring many avenues for solutions in order to reduce the number of traffic accidents involving youths. "There are places where there are curfews, and others where young people are not allowed to drive passengers other than their immediate families. I'm not saying that we'll do that here, but we really need to look around at what's happening elsewhere. We should take a look at Sweden, for example, where they have implemented a zero-accident objective."

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