

New York: State Busts More Than 100 Bodegas For Selling Alcohol To Underage Customers

Source: NY Daily News

Aug 19th

More than 100 bodegas across the city were busted for selling alcohol to underage customers during a three-day sting by the State Liquor Authority.

The State Liquor Authority visited 212 stores beginning Monday, sending six young men and women inside while a state investigator looked on. At 123 of the undercover visits - or about 58% - the decoys, ages 18 to 20, successfully bought booze.

Michael Jones, head of the SLA's New York City office, said the investigation was part of an ongoing crackdown in neighborhoods where fruit-flavored alcoholic beverages are popular with kids.

"The goal was to hit locations that we consider problem areas," Jones said.

Of the bodegas visited by the SLA, the Bronx had the highest citation rate. Thirty-eight of the 48 stores - about 79% - sold alcohol to underage spies in the borough. Manhattan wasn't far behind with 75% of the bodegas selling to customers under the age of 21.

In Brooklyn, officials issued citations at 59% of the businesses, followed by 40% in Staten Island and 28% in Queens.

The operation, which ended last night, was the SLA's largest underage alcohol sweep since the agency's creation in 1934.

The Daily News sent a baby-faced reporter - she turned 21 in June - to buy alcohol in some of the busted shops. She scored a six-pack of Blue Moon at the Soho Mini Market on Sixth Ave. just south of Houston St.

The cashier, gabbing away on her cell phone, barely looked up at the young Newser. And she didn't ask for identification.

"I card everyone," the worker said later, refusing to give her name. "Some people get mad at me when I ask for ID."

The state mailed violations to the 123 stores for selling alcohol to minors. First-time offenders face \$2,500 fines. Repeat offenders can be slapped

with fines of up to \$10,000. Business owners can lose their liquor licenses after a third offense.

An employee at Hudson Gourmet on Hudson St., one of the cited shops, admitted breaking the law.

"Sometimes we forget to card because it's busy," Jung Kyo said. "But we usually card. But sometimes it just happens."

Jones warned that battling underage drinking is the agency's top priority. This week's sting won't be the last.

"I'm not slowing down," he said. "Too many people are getting hurt."