



AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

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The Bar Suspension program has been one of the most effective programs that I've been involved with since becoming the Crime Prevention Officer in our Town. The program began in 2009 and I credit it for helping stem the violent incidents at our local downtown bars.

The purpose of the program is *"To encourage and promote a safe and comfortable environment for all patron and staff that frequent and work at licensed lounges and beverage rooms."* It accomplishes this by the participants honouring each other's suspensions. If you cause trouble at one bar and are issued a suspension from returning, the suspension also applies to all the participating bars. The suspensions send a clear message that unruly behaviour will not be tolerated in our community. Suspensions range from a period of 1 month to an *"indefinite suspension"*. Indefinite suspensions are a minimum of 12 months and are reviewed on their anniversary date only if an individual puts forth a letter asking for a review from the committee. If restitution is owed as a result of the incident which generated the suspension it will continue indefinitely until the restitution is paid. A suspension can be issued for incidents that occur at a location away from the bar, i.e threats or harassment of an employee at another location. A person who violates the suspension can be charged under Section 3(1)(e) of the Protection of Property Act, which carries a fine of \$227.41. Persons under the legal drinking age of 19 who are found in a licenced premise are issued a suspension which remains in effect until their 20th birthday. Currently 51 individuals are on the bar suspension list.

This bar suspension model has been adapted in Truro, Halifax and other communities in Nova Scotia. I would love to see the program go province wide and see troublemakers banned from all bars in Nova Scotia. This would provide a powerful incentive for bar patrons to behave while out on the town.

Binge Drinking is also a problem, with individuals drinking heavily prior to heading out to the bars. Transportation issues and the lack of taxis can also be an issue when bar crowds are leaving after closing time. We are fortunate in Amherst to have several cab companies who will remove patrons from problem areas.

The Amherst Police Department also suggests the following tips to make sure everyone enjoys their time out when visiting the local nightlife in our community.

- Make sure that you inform family or friends where you will be during the course of the evening.
- Never leave your drink unattended and do not accept any drink that you have not seen prepared.
- Designate a person in your group to be the sober driver and never accept a ride from anyone who has been drinking.

- Do not leave your purse unattended.
- Always carry a cell phone in case of emergencies and make sure you have enough money for taxi services
- Familiarize yourself with the emergency exits in the bars so you know where they are if there is a fire or other emergency
- Employ a “buddy system” where individuals will keep a watchful eye of their friends. If their friend is seen consuming too much alcohol, then start the process of making sure that they arrive to their home safely.

While Amherst Police members routinely perform bar walks and attempt to show a police presence when bars are closing, the problem can only go away if people begin to show better judgement when they are at the bars.