

Warm Springs Tribe To Receive National Award For Anti-Drug Effort

by Bend Weekly News Sources

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs will be recognized as a national "success story" Saturday for a serious effort to combat alcohol and other drugs on the Central Oregon reservation.

The tribe will receive an award in Baltimore at the concluding luncheon of the seventh annual leadership conference of the Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center. It will be the fourth award to Oregon in six years.

"Since April, people abusing alcohol or engaging in illegal drug activity in Warm Springs housing authority units have been subject to eviction," said Caroline Cruz, who provides technical assistance to the tribes in her role as alcohol and drug prevention specialist in the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS).

"Tribal officials tell me no one has lost housing so far but that the new policy has led to more people getting into treatment and onto a path to recovery."

The new policy applies to persons both leasing and buying units from the housing authority. Exclusion from leased housing authority units would last for at least 12 months and purchase agreements would be terminated.

"When you get on a waiting list for housing, it can take years because housing is scarce," Cruz said. "People are going to think twice about their behavior."

ODHS's work with tribes is part of its larger effort to promote personal and public health by delivering effective prevention and treatment services.

The award will be accepted Saturday by Jeff Sanders, Warm Springs Housing Authority executive director. "We believe that many of our social problems have been centered on alcohol," Sanders said. "We want to turn this around. We want to stop our teenagers from dying due to the consequences of alcohol abuse. We want Warm Springs to be seen as a safe and decent place to raise families."

Warm Springs data show that alcohol is by far the most abused substance among the 1,053 people admitted to treatment over a three-year period. The average age of first use by persons in treatment was 14 and 15 years.

Besides its ramifications for adults, Cruz said, awareness of the new policy and resulting change in community norms should reduce underage drinking on the reservation and adults' contributions to it. She said details about the Warm Springs model would be shared with the state's eight other federally recognized tribes at a September quarterly meeting in Lincoln City.

Meanwhile, she said, the ODHS Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services has given the nine tribes \$4,000 each to conduct surveys to obtain community profiles of underage drinking. She said she expects those results also to be presented at the September meeting.

"The Warm Springs model is an excellent example of how people can take serious steps to alter community norms, influence behavior and improve personal and public health and quality of life," Cruz said.

The Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center, at whose conference the award will be presented, was established by the U.S. Department of Justice to support its Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's effort to enforce underage drinking laws.