

Peer pressure for drunk-driving reform



George Lane IR Staff Photographer

Marty Lambert, attorney for Gallatin County and president of the Montana County Attorneys Association, laments that bills dealing with drinking and driving are not getting passed through their committees. Standing behind him are (L-R) Rep. Jeanne Windham, D-Polson; Leo Gallagher, attorney for Lewis and Clark County; Leo Dutton, Undersheriff of Lewis and Clark County; Troy McGee, Helena Police Chief; and Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger.

Groups urge lawmakers to pass drunk-driving bills

By JENNIFER McKEE
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HELENA — Lawmakers need to hurry up and pass a bundle of bills designed to put teeth in the slogan that Montana is tough on underage drinking and drinking while driving, law enforcement, anti-drunk driving groups and the lieutenant governor, said Wednesday.

Leaders from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Montana County Attorneys Association, Montana Sheriff's and Peace Officers Association and Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger pushed lawmakers to pass nine bills dealing with underage drinking and drinking while driving, including two that have stalled in committee.

They also said it's too soon to start celebrating an imminent

HB98 has been stalled in the Senate Judiciary Committee. A companion bill, HB99, passed out of a House committee Wednesday morning.

98, by Rep. Michael Lange, R-Billings, which would lengthen to one year the time a person's driver's license is suspended if the person refuses to take a Breathalyzer test for the first time. The

passage of a ban on open containers of alcohol in vehicles, despite the historic fact that a bill calling for such a ban has passed both the House and the Senate.

"We're ahead by one run," said Bohlinger. "That's too thin a margin."

The groups urged lawmakers to pass House Bill

suspension jumps to three years if the person refuses to take a Breathalyzer test for a second time.

HB98 has been stalled in the Senate Judiciary Committee. A companion bill, HB99, passed out of a House committee Wednesday morning. That bill, which the groups also support, would increase penalties if someone was caught driving on a suspended license if the license was revoked for an alcohol-related crime.

They also pushed to pass House Bill 348, by Rep. Rosie Buzzas, D-Missoula, which would require registration of all kegs sold to make them easier to track to the buyer if an underage person illegally drinks from it.

That bill has been tabled in the Senate Business, Labor and Economic Affairs Committee.