

Device fills message void among teens

Wizmark spreads the word against tobacco and alcohol use in boys restrooms of area high schools.

By Holly Wagner
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Getting the anti-tobacco, anti-drinking message to teens isn't easy.

The Adams County Substance Abuse Coalition and InTouch has tried fortune cookies, flying disks, T-shirts and flip-flops. One of its more successful mediums has been the stall readers — fliers with bits of trivia, including the number of Adams County youth who don't use alcohol and tobacco — posted on the inside of toilet stall doors.

But teenage boys don't spend much time in stalls. So JoLynn Stow, assistant coordinator with InTouch, came up with a new idea: talking urinals. InTouch ordered Wizmark devices for installation in the boys rooms at Payson, Unity, Camp Point and Quincy high schools over the past week. The Wizmark was designed to present advertisements in a place guaranteed to deliver at least three seconds of the target male audience's undivided attention.

Activated when light is blocked, a recorded message in the plastic disks acknowledges that indeed it's odd to hear a urinal speak. It then delivers the coalition's statistics about the number of local teens who aren't abusing substances.

Stow admits she had some hesitancy about buying the devices, which cost about \$22 each.

"I was not sure how they'd be received by students," she said.

"It's gotten the kids' attention," said Bill Reed, dean of students at Central High School in Camp Point. "The kids didn't know what the heck was going on."

The devices drew a little too much attention at Unity.

High School in Mendon, where Principal Bill Dorethy said they already have been removed.

“They were causing a disruption,” Dorethy said. “Kids were being goofy and inappropriate.”

John Wallace, principal of Seymour High School in Payson, said he had no plans to remove the Wizmarks.

“We’ve had a lot of fun with them, really,” he said. “It was the whole talk of the day the first day we put them in there.”

Some classes even organized “tours” so the girls could see what the fuss was about.

“It did what it was supposed to have done — got them talking,” Wallace said.

Quincy High student Josh Booher said he thought at first the recording was the voice of someone in the room.

Then he realized the urinal was “preaching to me. ... It seemed a little ridiculous.”

Booher said he doesn’t know whether the Wizmarks will sway the behavior of male teens, “but it can’t be denied that the tactic is pretty creative.”

“The voice made me a little uncomfortable at first,” he said. “But after getting used to it, I really don’t mind. In fact, it makes the day a little more ... interesting.”

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