Acadiana Ranks Highest
In Drug, Alcohol Deaths

Acadiana ranks highest in the state in drug- and alcohol-related deaths, DWI charges, and narcotic drug law violations, according to recent statewide surveys.

Ann Reinstein, associate professor of the USL College of Nursing and a registered nurse, says the area’s ranking, compiled by substance abuse clinicians, is a dubious honor.

The area also has the largest number of multiple offenders arrested for driving while intoxicated, she said.

Students in the University of Southwestern Louisiana College of Nursing are spearheading efforts, along with the Lafayette Substance Abuse clinicians, to alert the people of Acadiana to this health problem that has reached epidemic proportions. The week of October 18 to the 24 has been proclaimed Substance Abuse Awareness Week in Acadiana.

The problems with dangerous substances exist even in schools, she said. Schools in Acadiana have a high percentage of suspensions and expulsions of students due to abuse of alcohol and/or hard drugs.

More Americans die each year because of alcohol and drug abuse than were killed in the entire American involvement in Vietnam, she said. More than 60,000 Americans die in drug- and alcohol-related deaths every year.

More than nine million Americans are alcoholics. Alcoholism is the third leading disease killer in this country, surpassed only by cancer and heart disease.

Alcohol causes people to die in preventable accidents and also to take their own or someone else’s life, she said.

Alcoholism is a disease which can become acute and fatal and it also leads to other diseases and bodily deterioration.

"Alcoholism is an illness resulting from uncontrolled drinking," Reinstein said. "An increasing number of people abuse hard drugs regularly. Substance abuse is a treatable health problem."

"In the United States," Reinstein says, "about 7 out of 10 adults drink alcoholic beverages and one in 10 is an alcoholic."

"Abuse of hard drugs can be equally devastating; abuse can cause legal, social and medical problems which disrupt family life and destroy the individual," the professor said.

Alcoholism strikes all classes, colors, creeds and ages of people. "Substance abuse is no respecter of persons," Reinstein said.