Task Force Asks Delay On Drunk-Driver Laws

By MIKE HASTEN
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A special Task Force On Drunk Driving is asking the City Council to hold back its open alcohol container ordinance and any other anti-drunk-driver laws until the group has researched the problem and formed suggestions for battling the problem.

At their first meeting last night, task force members said they expect to suggest ordinances and programs to stop deaths on highways due to drunk drivers.

The City Council is scheduled Tuesday to vote on a controversial ordinance that would outlaw having alcoholic beverages in vehicles in the city. But because the task force wants to research this and other methods of solving the drunk-driving problem, members are asking the Council to delay action.

The task force is expected to come up with proposals within 60 days.

Study Committees

The 16-member group will break into study committees and report their results to the full group. Members said they want to examine local statistics, formulate methods of preventing drunk driving and recommend projects for other agencies to operate.

During yesterday’s discussion, proposals mentioned included public education programs, stronger court sentences and alternatives to jailing offenders.

State legislators are now battling over numerous drunk driver bills that the task force wants to examine. It also plans to look over programs used in other states and to study the seriousness of the local problem.

One of the statewide proposals, a bill by Lafayette Rep. Ron Gomez to outlaw open alcohol containers in vehicles, has run into trouble. Gomez has been rewriting the bill to satisfy questions raised but it has not yet been brought up for consideration.

Enough Laws

Ray Green, a member of the task force, said he believes the state already has enough laws on the books to get drunks off the road. The problem, he said, is enforcement.

“We’ve got the laws, in my opinion,” he said.

But an examination of court records shows the maximum penalty ($300 fine for first offense, $500 for second and prison for third) has never been imposed in Lafayette and law enforcement officers are not doing their jobs by keeping drunks off the road, Green said. “I’ve talked myself out. I’m ready for action.”

Dr. May Waggoner, head of a group known as the Concerned Citizens Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said she wants the task force to conduct a poll of the community to see what residents believe should be done. Such a poll could probably be performed by USL, she said.

The task force is scheduled to meet each Monday at 5:30 at City Hall. But because of conflicts in scheduling next week, the meeting will be held at 5:30 Wednesday.