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Southern Miss Greek life faces tough times

From staff reports

It's apparent the message about the dangers of too much alcohol isn't getting through to some young people. The latest example of that is the hazing incident at the Kappa Sigma fraternity at the University of Southern Mississippi in which two students were hospitalized with alcohol poisoning.

One of the students was treated and released. The second - a student from Waveland - remains in intensive care at Forrest General Hospital.

The mother of the sophomore student who remains hospitalized said her daughter had been invited to become a Kappa Sigma little sister. She attended a party on Aug. 28 in which female students who are already little sisters initiated the new students.

"They poured pancake syrup in their hair and silly string - things like that," the mother told the Hattiesburg American. "Then they tilted their heads back and poured in whiskey and vodka."

Some students who were at the party brought her daughter to the hospital, saying they had found her on the side of the road. She had a blood-alcohol content of 0.47, more than five times the legal limit of 0.08. To put that in perspective, a 100-pound woman would have to drink more than 10 cocktails in an hour to have a 0.47 blood content.

When a body absorbs too much alcohol, it can directly impact the central nervous system, slowing breathing, heart rate and gag reflex. This can lead to choking, coma and even death.

After a hearing with the administration, Southern Miss officials took swift and stern action. Kappa Sigma had its charter revoked and its campus house closed on Friday.

In addition, criminal charges of hazing could be brought against the students involved as well as disciplinary action from the school.

In Mississippi, a hazing conviction could mean up to six months in jail and a \$2,000 fine.

"This type of behavior is intolerable on our campus, and our university police department continues to investigate the matter," President Martha Saunders said. "Those found guilty of being involved face serious consequences."

Saunders and the administration should be applauded for taking swift action against the fraternity. The school could have allowed the incident to be quietly investigated and disposed of, but that wasn't the case.

It is not the first hazing incident the university has had to deal with. The Zeta Phi Beta sorority was suspended for three years in 2006 by its national office for a hazing incident.

And the American reported last week that the university and Sigma Nu fraternity reached an out-of-court settlement with the family of a Meridian man who died after playing beer pong at the fraternity house in 2004.

Financial terms of the settlement were not revealed. Part of the settlement called for Sigma Nu to remove photos promoting alcohol consumption from its Web site. And Southern Miss established a scholarship in the name of Sammy Broadhead, 25, the USM alumnus who died after drinking a large amount of alcohol at the fraternity house.

Southern Miss has boosted its efforts to stop such incidents. But the school must rely on the fraternity and sorority leaders to control the drinking.

How sad it must be for parents to send a child off to school and get a call that the student has been hospitalized for alcohol poisoning. It's a call that can be easily avoided.
