

Health advocates worry post-marathon pub crawl could encourage binge drinking

1666 [Patrick Springer](#) on May 9, 2015 at 6:00 a.m.



FARGO—Public health officials worry that the 27th Mile Post Race Pub Crawl associated with the Scheels Fargo Marathon sends a message that's out of step with the run's health and wellness aura.

[See complete Fargo Marathon coverage here](#)

The event, a new addition to this year's post-race celebrations, is a pub crawl organized by 10 downtown taverns.

Participants can buy a mug and fill it for \$5, with \$3 refills. Those who get a "passport" stamp for visiting all 10 bars during the six-hour event are eligible for a limited edition commemorative medal.

Although pub crawl rules note that an alcoholic beverage isn't required for a bar stamp, public health officials are concerned that the promotion could encourage excessive, binge drinking.

"Since it's bars and they are offering a beer mug, I think the tendency would be to have a drink" at each stop, said Robyn Litke Sall, alcohol misuse prevention coordinator for Fargo Cass Public Health.

"That's a huge concern," she said. "That's excessive for men and women."

Binge drinking, Litke Sall added, is defined as five or more drinks for men, four or more drinks for women, on one occasion.

A drink is a 12-ounce beer with 5 percent alcohol content, an 8-ounce malt liquor with 7 percent alcohol content or a 1½-ounce, 40 percent alcohol distilled spirit.

If someone drinks 10 beers during the six-hour pub crawl, which is from 2 to 8 p.m. today, their body would require 15 hours to fully metabolize the alcohol, Litke Sall said.

Mark Knutson, organizer of the Fargo Marathon, said the intent of allowing the pub crawl to be associated with the foot race was to showcase the downtown and to have a fun event to cap the experience for runners and spectators.

"Our whole thought was to get people into town," he said Friday. "That's why that's happening."

Downtown bar owners approached him with the pub crawl idea, Knutson said, and he agreed. In recent years, the marathon hosted a post-race concert. The pub crawl includes a performance by the band Skyline.

By leaving the entertainment events to others, marathon organizers can concentrate on the race events, which draw 20,000 runners, Knutson said.

"Let someone else put on the party," Knutson said. He added that this year's St. Patrick's Day parade included a pub crawl that was well attended.

Fargo-Moorhead has a longstanding problem with binge drinking, a culturally embedded problem that is much more prevalent than in most areas, Litke Sall said.

For instance, she said, the metro area ranked No. 1 among 187 metro areas in 2012 with a binge-drinking rate of 28.1 percent, much higher than the national rate of 16.9 percent.

"We clearly have a problem with this already," Litke Sall said. "We don't need any encouragement."

Fargo Cass Public Health recently received a \$400,000 federal grant to combat binge drinking.

Litke Sall said the message of the pub crawl is that alcohol is a natural ingredient in any large gathering, even one that is tied to an event dedicated to health and wellness like the Fargo Marathon.

"I think that's an individual choice," Knutson said, referring to the decision of pub crawl participants and whether they overindulge if imbibing. "Hopefully they won't."