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We only want happy side of Schoolies on show: Organisers



READY TO PARTY: Hayley Morris, Amelia Digance, Caitlin Schmaal and, front, Stephanie Leggett are off to Schoolies celebrations in Victor Harbor. Picture: MATT CARTY

LAUREN NOVAK
HANNAH SILVERMAN

SCHOOLIES Festival organisers have made a hamfisted attempt to hide the ugly side of this weekend's teen celebrations at Victor Harbor.

Encounter Youth, which runs the three-day event, has tried to restrict media access, asking outlets not to photograph or film individuals' faces or those receiving first-aid, contact or visit the local hospital or enter first-aid tents.

While Encounter Youth says the limits are normal protocol and only apply to sites being controlled by organisers, parents and press freedom advocates have expressed concerns over the restrictions.

At last year's festival, police made 43 arrests, 13 people were treated by ambulance crews and a woman, 18, was sexually assaulted.

Director David Knuckey, of the SA Association of State School Organisations, which represents parents of 90 per cent of public school students, questioned what Encounter Youth

was trying to hide. "I think parents would like to know if there's a significant increase in incidents down there," he said. "If parents are sending their children down there based on information that it's all safe they might be concerned that the reports are that way because the media aren't allowed to report incidents."

Press Council chairman Ken McKinnon said: "If they (schoolies) are in a public place in a public event then the press is perfectly free to report upon them and, in fact, has a responsibility to report such matters in the public interest."

Encounter Youth director Luke Ritchie said: "We don't have anything to hide. We're best supporting our working partners and schoolies. If media wants to attend our venue, we need to know who's on site for occupational health and safety issues."

School-leaver Amelia Digance, 18, is heading to Schoolies with nine friends to have "a good, fun, safe time". "I think it's a pretty safe thing, the few (bad) events that do happen get the media attention," she said.

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THE FESTIVAL LOWDOWN

- Schoolies will be held at Warland Reserve, in the centre of Victor Harbor, and run from Friday to Sunday.
- The Schoolies Festival site includes dance tents, a chill-out cafe and lounge tent.
- Festival hours are 7pm to 2am.
- About 140 police officers and 450 volunteers from organiser Encounter Youth will be present.
- About 8000 young people are expected to attend.
- In 2007 more than 60 ecstasy tablets were seized and 43 people arrested.
- Last year more than 125 expiation notices were issued to people drinking in the town's dry zone and 48 people cautioned for their behaviour.
- In September two young men appeared in an Adelaide court charged with raping a woman during the 2007 celebrations.

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