

# Environmental Prevention of Underage Drinking

# Alcohol Compliance Checks

## What are alcohol compliance checks?

Alcohol compliance checks are a type of environmental prevention that deters alcohol outlets from selling alcohol to underage youth. Law enforcement officials supervise undercover youth who attempt to purchase alcohol; if the attempt is successful, the establishment is penalized. Compliance checks are thought to be most effective when they are frequent, well publicized, and well designed; solicit community support; and impose penalties on the licensed establishment rather than just the server.

## How do alcohol compliance checks reduce underage drinking and its consequences?

Frequent use of compliance checks decreases alcohol sales to minors significantly and are associated with reduced alcohol-related injuries. By decreasing alcohol availability, compliance checks are believed to also reduce alcohol-related problems and crime among youth. Nationally, according to the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 7.6 percent of past-month drinkers purchased their own alcohol the last time they drank. Variations by state ranged from 3.1 percent to 18.8 percent.

## How can my community take this action?

Take the following steps to initiate or strengthen compliance checks:

- **Engage the media.** To understand why compliance checks are needed and aren't a way to target and unnecessarily punish merchants, the community needs to understand the frequency of illegal alcohol purchases by youth; the nature and rate of youth alcohol-related problems within the community; and the link among alcohol availability, consumption, and alcohol-related problems. Media advocacy may be needed to convince a skeptical community and law enforcement to commit resources to implementing these checks.
- **Use social media to expand public outreach.** Consider using electronic media (e.g., websites and e-mail lists) and social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter) to raise awareness about your compliance check-related activities and to get input from the community.

- **Conduct Town Hall Meetings to build community support for compliance checks.** Town Hall Meetings provide a way to help increase understanding and awareness of underage drinking and its consequences, as well as encourage individuals, families, and communities to address the problem. They are designed to alert and empower the community as well as generate interest from the media. Town Hall Meetings can give local communities the opportunity to come together to learn more about underage drinking and its impact on both individuals and the community.
- **Measure and report successful outcomes.** Some objective and subjective measures of the effectiveness of alcohol compliance checks are:
  - Rates of motor vehicle crashes involving youth;
  - Rates of youth arrested and convicted of driving under the influence;
  - Degree of support from merchants;
  - Self-report of underage drinking and impaired driving;
  - Perceived likelihood among youth of being caught driving with an illegal blood alcohol level; and
  - Awareness of impaired driving and zero tolerance laws.

## Resources Supporting Action

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). *The Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit*. From [http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/SocialMediaToolkit\\_BM.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf) (accessed December 15, 2013).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006). Preventing excessive alcohol consumption: Enhanced enforcement of laws prohibiting sales of alcohol to minors. *Guide to Community Preventive Services*. From <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/lawsprohibitingales.html> (accessed December 15, 2013).
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Enforcement of Underage Drinking Laws Training Center. Alcohol Compliance Check Database. From <http://www.udetc.org/aps/ComplianceChkDB.htm> (accessed December 15, 2013). The Center also offers:
  - *Guide to Responsible Alcohol Sales: Off-Premise Clerk, Licensee, and Manager Training* (1999);
  - *Preventing Sales of Alcohol to Minors: What You Should Know About Merchant Education Programs* (revised 2010); and
  - *Strategies for Reducing Third-Party Transactions of Alcohol to Underage Youth* (updated 2012).
- These publications are available at <http://www.udetc.org/Publications.htm> (accessed December 15, 2013).
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2010). *Focus on Prevention*. From <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA10-4120/SMA10-4120.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2013).

## About Environmental Prevention

Environmental prevention focuses on changing the environment in ways that make alcohol less available and appealing to young people. Some goals of environmental prevention are to change social norms or attitudes relating to the use of alcohol, to restrict youth access to alcohol, and to strengthen enforcement of laws and regulations governing its use. Environmental prevention of underage drinking also includes:

- Controls on alcohol outlet location and density;
- Graduated driver licensing laws;
- Increased taxes on sales of alcohol;
- Responsible beverage service;
- Restricted sales of alcohol at public events;
- Restrictions on low-price, high-volume drink specials;
- Sobriety and traffic safety checkpoints; and
- Social host liability laws.

Visit <https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/townhallmeetings> for more information.

Materials to support national Town Hall Meetings on the prevention of underage drinking are provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.