

# Environmental Prevention of Underage Drinking

# Controls on Alcohol Outlet Location and Density

## What is alcohol outlet location/density and how is it controlled?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Alcohol outlet density regulation is defined as applying regulatory authority to reduce alcoholic beverage outlet density or to limit the increase of alcoholic beverage outlet density. Regulation is often implemented through licensing or zoning processes. An alcohol outlet is a place where alcohol may be legally sold for the buyer to drink there (on-premises outlets, such as bars or restaurants) or elsewhere (off-premises outlets, such as liquor stores). Density refers to the number of alcohol outlets in a given area."<sup>1</sup>

## How do controls on alcohol outlet location/density reduce underage drinking and its consequences?

Areas with higher alcohol outlet density have higher levels of heavy drinking and alcohol-related problems, including violence, crime, alcohol-involved traffic crashes, and injuries. Thus, reducing the density of alcohol outlets should result in fewer drinking-related problems. Research suggests that college students, for example, tend to drink more frequently and heavily and experience more alcohol problems when alcohol outlets are located within 2 miles of campus. Geographic buffer zones between an alcohol establishment and a youth-related area reduce the youth access to alcohol by making it less prevalent in their immediate environment.

## How can my community take this action?

Take the following steps to reduce alcohol outlet density:

- **Assess alcohol density in your community, with special attention to density near schools and other youth-related areas.** Work with community members to survey and map the number and locations of alcohol outlets in the targeted area or contact your state's licensing board or local alcohol licensing authority for the locations of the alcohol licenses in the community.
- **Ascertain the rate of alcohol-related problems in the community, with an emphasis on drinking and driving, public intoxication, and alcohol-related violence and crimes.** Based on the type of community problem, develop a local plan to control the density of alcohol-related outlets. Recruit institutions responsible for

<sup>1</sup> CDC. (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).

establishing, maintaining, and enforcing compliance with zoning regulations within the community.

- **Use your findings to develop a local plan to control the density of alcohol-related outlets.** Your plan might, for example, create geographic buffer zones of approximately 1,000 feet between alcohol outlets and schools, playgrounds, other youth facilities, and residential neighborhoods, or the plan might promote conditional use permits that require alcohol establishments to meet minimal agreed-upon conditions in order to continue operating, such as conducting responsible beverage service training.
- **Build community support for controls on alcohol outlet location and density from merchants, other community members, and law enforcement.** Conduct activities to show the link between the density of alcohol outlets in the community and the rate/type of alcohol-related problems.
- **Measure and report successful outcomes.** Some objective measures of the effectiveness of reduced alcohol outlet density are:
  - Increased distance between alcohol outlets and between an alcohol outlet and a youth-related facility or area;
  - Reductions in the number of alcohol-related crimes and other problems (e.g., alcohol-related crashes) in a targeted area;

- Decreased rates of underage drinking; and
- Decreased number of calls to law enforcement complaining of incidents related to specific alcohol outlets or near alcohol outlets.

## Resources Supporting Action

CDC. (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).

CDC. (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/lawsprohibitingsales.html> (accessed December 15, 2013).

CDC Task Force on Community Preventive Services. (2009). Recommendations for reducing excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms by limiting alcohol outlet density. From <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/RecommendationsReducingExcessiveAlcoholConsumptionAlcohol-RelatedHarmsLimitingAlcoholOutletDensity.pdf> (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:

- Alcohol compliance checks;
- 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.