

Environmental Prevention of Underage Drinking

Restrictions on Low-Price, High-Volume Drink Specials

What are restrictions on low-price, high-volume drink specials?

These restrictions (sometimes called “happy hour” restrictions) prohibit or limit on-premises retailers from using various price-related marketing tactics, such as happy hours and two-for-one drink specials, that promote heavier alcohol consumption. These promotions are particularly prevalent in college communities, where large numbers of underage students are present.

Restrictions on low-price, high-volume drink specials may prohibit:

- Reduced pricing during specific days or times;
- Free beverages;
- Additional servings;
- Unlimited beverages at a set price and time;
- Increased drink volume; and
- Drinks as prizes.

How do these restrictions reduce underage drinking and its consequences?

Drink specials encourage underage drinking by making alcohol more affordable and appealing. This—in turn—may encourage young people to engage in other illegal actions, such as driving under the influence. A Harvard School of Public Health’s College Alcohol Study demonstrated a significant correlation between lower drink prices and higher binge drinking rates among 119 colleges across the United States. This same study demonstrated a reduction in self-reported drinking and driving rates when laws limited underage access to alcohol and even greater reductions when these laws were actively enforced.

How can my community take this action?

Take the following steps to initiate or strengthen restrictions:

- **Determine whether your state and community have any type of restrictions on drink specials.** If few or no restrictions exist, mobilize community members around getting more restrictions passed. This effort could target the city, county, or state level. Provide a ready-made law for policymakers (see “Resources Supporting Action” for a link to sample state policies). If comprehensive restrictions are in place, assess how well they are being enforced.
- **Raise public awareness.** Help the community and local leadership understand the link between drink specials and increased consequences, such as alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes and fatalities.
- **Enlist the critical support of law enforcement.** Many states place restrictions on at least one type of happy hour alcohol promotions or similar drink specials. However, the report *Preventing Over-consumption of Alcohol—Sales to the Intoxicated and “Happy Hour” (Drink Special) Laws* (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2005) found that enforcement of restrictions is low.

- **Measure and report successful outcomes.** Build public support for sustained restrictions by charting their effectiveness. Potential outcomes may be reductions in rates or numbers of:
 - Alcohol-related crimes;
 - Alcohol-related injuries;
 - Arrests for driving under the influence;
 - Motor vehicle crashes; and
 - Youth fatalities in motor vehicle crashes.

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 (accessed December 15, 2013).

Sample of state policies regarding happy hours and drink specials. (N.D.). From <http://www.udetc.org/documents/HappyHoursDrinkSpecialsPolicies.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;
- 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;
- 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.