

## UNDERAGE DRINKING ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES

### Background and Overview

Underage alcohol use is a serious issue impacting communities across New York State. Adults play a role when they sell or serve alcohol to youth under the age of 21, when they host parties where young people are drinking, and when they condone underage alcohol use. Every community, neighborhood and family should be concerned about alcohol use by youth under 21 because it is associated with the three most common causes of teenage deaths: accidental deaths, homicides and suicides as reported in the 2003 National Survey of Parents. In addition, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reports that higher levels of alcohol use are associated with unplanned or unprotected sexual activity among adolescents, posing increased risk for teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. Alcohol use and higher levels of use among adolescents is associated with poor grades, absenteeism and higher school drop-out rates.

Everyone can play a role in reducing the use of alcohol by youth under 21 by using the following environmental strategies:

- Limit the access of alcohol to youth.
- Create clear, consistent no-use messages in each community.
- Implement evidence-based programs and practices in our school and community settings.
- Partner with state and local key stakeholders to address the issues related to underage drinking.

### Environmental Strategies

#### Media:

1. Educate the community through mass media campaigns targeting community norms related to underage drinking. Successful campaigns explicitly state the objectives, use appealing models and frequently present the message through a variety of channels over a long period of time.
2. Use countermarketing/counteradvertising to disseminate information about the hazards of underage drinking.
3. Display notices or warnings in alcohol establishments and public places that give information about the legal, social and health effects of alcohol use.
4. Use mass media to advance a public policy initiative or message through PSAs, letters to the editor and press events.
5. Use marketing techniques developed through commercial advertising to promote a social marketing approach.
6. Build the skills of parents, community members and youth to analyze and evaluate messages presented in the media.

#### Policy:

1. Create or enforce policies regarding the advertisement of alcoholic beverages aimed at underage drinking.
2. Prohibit access to alcohol by youth at public events.
3. Restrict availability of alcohol in public places by enforcing open container laws and enforcing restrictions on the hours and places of sale.
4. Ban alcohol advertising and sponsorship at public events targeting young people and their families.

5. Provide written guidelines and training opportunities for employees at stores, bars or restaurants that sell alcohol.
6. Educate and train beverage servers on penalties, signs of intoxication and checking for false identification.
7. Install and use driver's license scanners in all alcohol retailers in the community.
8. Examine creating policies that restrict alcohol sales in specific areas of a retail establishment, away from the products traditionally associated with youth and not at the counter in single containers.

#### Enforcement:

Partner with local law enforcement agencies to identify and support the appropriate environmental strategies for underage drinking enforcement.

1. Fine and revoke the licenses of alcohol license holders that fail to comply with state laws and local ordinances.
2. Enforce the Social Host Liability, making adults who provide alcohol to underage youth responsible.
3. Penalize adults who purchase beer kegs for underage youth.
4. Develop strategies to discourage parties where alcohol is being served to minors and hold legally accountable the underage youth and the adults who provide alcohol to them.
5. Enforce drinking and driving laws, including zero tolerance and license revocation.
6. Enforce state laws for underage youth for using false identification to purchase alcohol.
7. Identify establishments that sell alcohol to youth through mandatory or voluntary compliance checks.

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#### Information compiled from the following resources:

*Policies to Reduce Youth Access to Alcohol.* Alcohol Epidemiology Program, University of Minnesota, Wagenaar.  
*Principles of Substance Abuse Prevention: A Guide to Science-Based Practices in Substance Abuse Prevention.* Department of Health and Human Services.  
*Strategies to Reduce Underage Alcohol Use: Typology and Brief Overview.* OJJDP, Holder.  
*Regulatory Strategies for Preventing Youth Access to Alcohol: Best Practices.* OJJDP, Holder.  
*Enforcement: A Strategy of Prevention Practitioners.* Northeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies.  
*Improving the Larger Environment.* Northeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies.