

# 3. Controlling Alcohol Outlet Location and Density

## CSAP Primary Prevention Strategies

- Information dissemination
- Community-based process
- Environmental

### Strategy

Controlling alcohol outlet location and density consists of limiting or reducing the number of alcohol beverage outlets (on- and off-premise licensees) within a specified geographical area. This strategy also examines the location of alcohol establishments within a neighborhood, community, city, parish or county.

Efforts to control the number and location of alcohol outlets must be based on community data and evidence. Research has shown that geographical areas with increased alcohol outlet density have increased levels of heavy drinking and alcohol-related problems, including violence, crime, alcohol-related traffic crashes and injuries. According to the Final Report of the NIAAA's Task Force on College Drinking's Panel on Prevention and Treatment (2002), restrictions on alcohol outlet density are effective environmental strategies for the general population.

**(See Summary Study Results on Outlet Density in the Suggested Resources section.)**

Geographic buffer zones between alcohol establishments and youth-related areas (schools, after-school settings, recreational parks, etc.) help reduce the accessibility of alcohol to young people by making it less prevalent in their immediate environments.

When needed, regulation is often implemented through licensing or zoning processes for both on- and off-premise alcohol licensees in a community. This process examines the number of alcohol licenses within the community, determines their exact locations, and matches alcohol-related problems with the location and volume of alcohol licensees. Your organization can also work with local officials to change current policies to limit and/or reduce the number of alcohol licenses within a given geographical area.

### Key Terms

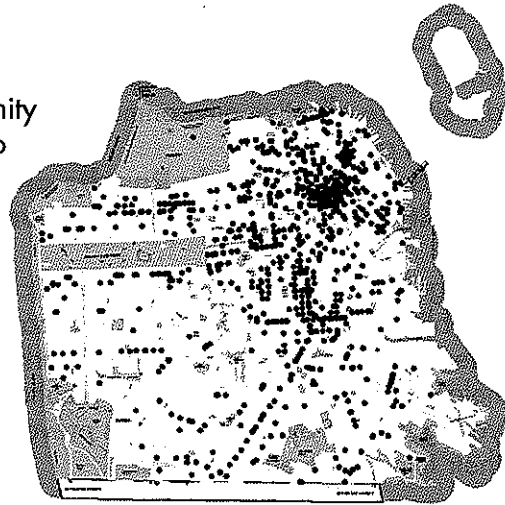
- 1. Alcohol licensee:** A business entity that has applied for a license to sell and/or serve alcoholic beverages at their place of business. Obtaining a license to sell/serve alcoholic beverages in any state must be approved by the state granting authority. Licenses are not free and all states place limits on the number of licenses that are made available within the state.
- 2. On-premise licensee:** A business that has a license to **serve** alcohol at their facility.
- 3. Off-premise licensee:** A business that has a license to **sell** alcohol at their facility.
- 4. On-/off-premise licensee:** A business that has a license to both **sell** and **serve** alcohol at their facility.
- 5. Alcohol outlet density:** The number of outlets licensed to **sell** alcohol within a given geographic area.
  - a. Geographical density:** the number of outlets in a specific land area.
  - b. Economic density:** the number of outlets as a percentage of other businesses in a geographical area.
  - c. Population density:** the number of outlets in relation to the population of a specific geographic area.
- 6. Alcohol outlet capacity:** The serving capacity of one outlet or of all outlets in a given area. On-sale capacity is calculated by the number of seats in the outlet or the outlet's square footage. Off-sale capacity is calculated by the number of linear feet of shelves devoted to alcohol sales or the outlet's square footage.

## Considerations for Planning

Research has linked outlet density to excessive alcohol use and related harms. Regulating the number of places in a given area where alcohol may be legally sold (outlet density) is an effective way to prevent excessive alcohol use and its related consequences. However, as you begin preparing for this strategy, be aware of your opposition. Alcohol retailers often bring additional dollars to the local community and may be considered a boost to your local economy. Some local business owners and community members may oppose recommendations for regulating these businesses. In addition, the alcohol industry is well-funded and experienced in fighting these efforts. In order to gain community and political support, it's important to be able to make a direct link between the number and/or location of alcohol outlets in your community and the rate/type of alcohol-related problems that occur. Geographic Information Software (GIS) is an effective way to demonstrate the relationship by creating overlays. It's also an interesting way to collect the data and create a visual display that is easy for others to understand.

## Fundamental Steps

1. Survey and map the alcohol outlets (on- and off-premise) in your community. Contact your state's licensing board or local alcohol licensing authority to obtain a list of the current alcohol licenses in your community.
2. Plot these locations on a map of the community or use GIS software such as ArcView at [www.esri.com](http://www.esri.com), or Geo Community at <http://software.geocomm.com>. More information can also be found at [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com). Note those alcohol outlets that have sold alcohol to underage youth and clearly mark their locations on the map. Also identify the locations of schools, youth centers, churches, etc. in your community and determine their proximity to alcohol outlets. Obtain data regarding the locations of alcohol-related crashes, injuries and fatalities and determine the distance from alcohol outlets in your community. Also, consider plotting the locations of alcohol-related crimes and violence. Begin to examine any connections that might exist.
3. Analyze the results from the map and determine the scope of the problem. Review additional local data that examines the number of state licenses in relation to the population in your community, the number of new licenses issued over a designated period of time, the number of different types of outlets in the community (retail versus bars) and the density of alcohol outlets in specified neighborhoods and/or communities.
4. Obtain information about alcohol outlet ordinances, zoning and how alcohol licenses are currently regulated, permitted and granted in your community. Determine any limitations and/or gaps with your current alcohol regulations. Clearly identify the need for any additional alcohol regulations within your community that will help reduce the alcohol-related problems.



Sample of GIS Mapping from the City and County of San Francisco, Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Section using ArcGIS Software. See the **Suggested Resources** section for more details.

5. Develop a color-coordinated map that clearly identifies the areas of concern. Summarize your findings into a written report and share with key stakeholders and community members.
6. Conduct a press conference to publicize the findings. Write a press release and letter to the editor that also discusses the results. (See *Sample News Release* on page 73.)
7. Develop a Plan of Action:
  - Based on the type of community problems, develop a local action plan by recruiting institutions that for establish, maintain and enforce zoning regulations within the community:
    - Local representatives of the state office that regulates alcohol sales licenses
    - Representatives from the local police department
    - Representatives from the local planning department
    - Elected officials
    - Alcohol policy organizations
    - Organizations influenced by alcohol availability, such as neighborhood organizations and schools
8. Petition city or county government to implement regulations tied to an action plan backed by evidence and community support.
9. Continue to monitor the community plan and document your progress. Identify and evaluate immediate, intermediate and long-term outcomes of the strategy.

## Components of a Community Plan

A community plan may include one or more of the following components:

- Creating a geographic buffer zone of approximately 1,000 feet between alcohol outlets and schools, play grounds, other youth facilities and residential neighborhoods.
- Restricting the number of alcohol outlets near youth-related areas, directly or indirectly, by making alcohol licenses more difficult to obtain.
- Requiring a certain distance between each alcohol outlet to prevent pockets of dense alcohol outlets.
- Promoting the use of conditional use permits that require alcohol establishments to meet agreed-upon conditions to continue operating (e.g., requiring bars to document that their bartenders attended a responsible beverage sales/service training course).
- Protesting the issuance of alcohol licenses in youth-related areas or in general. In South Carolina, for example, any person residing in a county where an alcohol license is being sought may protest its issuance, slowing down the process and requiring a hearing to grant the license.

**Policy examples can be found at: [www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org)**

# Helpful Tips and Suggestions

## Establishing Support and Obtaining Partners

Use the information you gathered from mapping the locations and number of outlets – and tie it to local data on alcohol-related problems. Contact and meet with those responsible for establishing, maintaining and enforcing compliance with zoning regulations in the community including:

- The state office that regulates alcohol sales licenses and zoning
- Your local police department and county law enforcement agency
- Local elected officials
- Alcohol prevention and policy organizations
- Neighborhood organizations that are influenced by alcohol availability

## Media Awareness and Advocacy

- Hold individual meetings with people (see above) who are in key positions to affect change.
- Hold a press conference describing the data collected about the number of alcohol-related problems that occur in dense pockets of alcohol outlets. Discuss how controlling alcohol outlet density can decrease alcohol-related problems.
- Try to get media coverage of the problem. Use your maps as visuals in your presentations.
- Stage a rally or an event in an area of high alcohol density to highlight the problem. Arrange to have community members discuss how alcohol-related problems affect them (property damage, vandalism, trash, assaults, fights, car crashes, etc.).
- Issue press releases that describe the activities or important events such as public hearings on the issuance of new liquor licenses.
- Write an "Op-Ed" piece. (**See the *Suggested Resources* section.**)
- Ensure that coalition members are available for interviews and educate all members about the data on alcohol outlet density so they are well prepared and knowledgeable.

## Potential Partners

- Local media – television and newspaper
- Local, county and state law enforcement agencies
- Local/state liquor control commission or your alcohol beverage control office
- Parents
- Youth
- Elected officials
- Zoning boards
- Alcohol licensees
- Bar owners/employees
- Local substance abuse prevention agencies
- Local/state health departments

## **Estimated Timeline**

- Six to nine months for research and planning
- Two to three years for implementation and evaluation

## **Potential Barriers or Obstacles**

- Lack of knowledge, training and experience with the political process and how to navigate the political system
- Concerns and fears about being perceived as controversial or adversarial within the community and the potential impact on established community relationships
- Inability to obtain support from the community and merchants — or opposition from local businesses and the alcohol industry
- Lack of support from policy makers and zoning boards — results are NOT immediate
- Alcohol outlet density may not begin to decline for two to three years





## **Possible Short- and Long-Term Outcomes**

- Increase in community awareness and support of additional alcohol laws, policies and/or ordinances related to alcohol outlet density
- Decrease in the number of active alcohol outlet licenses in a given area
- Increased distance between each alcohol outlet and between an alcohol outlet and youth-centered activity/facility
- Decrease in the number of alcohol licenses per capita or square mile
- Decrease in the number of new alcohol licenses issued over a specified time period
- Increase in additional policies, ordinances, etc. that regulate alcohol licenses
- Reductions in the number of alcohol-related crimes and other problems in a targeted area
- Decreased rates of underage drinking
- Decreased number of calls to law enforcement complaining of incidents at or near alcohol outlets



# Suggested Resources

## Supplemental Resources Related to this Strategy

1. Summary Study Results on Outlet Density.....	63
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3. Sample Density of Off-Premise Outlets.....	67
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 8. Strategic Planning Guide.....	243-251

## Additional Resources and Information Available at [faceproject.org](http://faceproject.org)

**Links** (A browser document called “Helpful Links” is located on the Resource CD for easier navigation.)\

### GIS Information

A geographic information system (GIS) integrates hardware, software and data for capturing, managing, analyzing and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information.

GIS allows us to view, understand, question, interpret and visualize data in many ways that reveal relationships, patterns and trends in the form of maps, globes, reports and charts.

[www.esri.com](http://www.esri.com)

<http://software.geocomm.com>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic\\_information\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_information_system)

[www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/supportingmaterials/outletdensity.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/supportingmaterials/outletdensity.html)

An in-depth look at alcohol outlet density regulation. Supporting materials help focus on the topics of Analytic Framework, Research Gaps, Summary Evidence Tables, including studies and strategies.

<http://resources.prev.org/documents/AlcoholViolenceGruenewald.pdf>

An article by Kathryn Stewart that discusses the strong connection between alcohol and violence and how this connection also relates to the location of establishments that sell alcohol.





# Summary Study Results on Outlet Density

- “Wetter” neighborhoods have higher levels of drinking, accidents and violence.”

Source: Scribner, Richard: Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research, February 2000.

- There is a 15-16% difference in individuals’ drinking attitudes and 11% difference in individuals’ alcohol consumption attributable to density of alcohol outlets in their neighborhoods.

Source: Scribner, Richard: Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research, February 2000.

- The number of alcohol outlets is related to violent assaults. A study done in 1995 in Los Angeles showed that each additional alcohol outlet was associated with 3.4 additional assaults per year.

Source: Scribner, R., Mackinnon, D. & Dwyer, J.: “The Risk of Assaultive Violence and Alcohol Availability in Los Angeles County.” American Journal of Public Health (85) 3: 335-340. 1995.

- Alcohol outlet density in Newark, New Jersey, was the single most important environmental factor explaining why violent crime rates are higher in certain areas of the city than in others. Alcohol outlet density was much more important in determining crime rates than other factors, including employment rate and median household income.

Source: LaBouvie, E. & Ontkush, M.: “Violent Crime and Alcohol Availability: Relationships in an Urban Community.” Journal of Public Health Policy 19(3):303-318. 1998.

- A study done in Cleveland showed that blocks that have more bars have higher crime rates for murder, rape, assault, robbery, burglary, grand theft and auto theft. Adding one bar to a block would result in 3.38 crimes committed on that block in a year. It would increase the risk of murder taking place on that block by 5%, and increase the risk of having a violent crime of any type by 17.6%. Authors’ postulate that increased bar density changes the character and environment of the neighborhood and the routine activities of those living or visiting that block.

Source: Runceck, D. & Maier, P. “Bars, Blocks and Crimes Revisited: Linking the Theory of Routine Activities to the Empiricism of ‘Hot Spots.’” Criminology (29) 4: 725-753. 1991.

- The level of drinking, drinking participation and participation in binge drinking are all significantly higher among all college students when a greater number of outlets licensed to sell alcoholic beverages exist near campus. This is particularly true for underage drinking.

Source: Chaloupka, F. & Wechsler, H. “Binge Drinking in College: The Impact of Price, Availability and Alcohol Control Policies.” Contemporary Economic Policy, vol xiv, October 1996.

- The distribution of off-sale alcohol outlets in New Orleans is geographically related to homicides. The study, conducted in 1994-95, showed that neighborhoods with high densities of off-sale alcohol outlets also have high rates of homicide even after controlling for race, unemployment, age structure and social disintegration. A typical New Orleans census tract with two off-sale outlets has a homicide rate that is 24% higher than a census tract with one outlet.

Source: Scribner, R. et al.: “Alcohol Availability and Homicide in New Orleans: Conceptual Considerations for Small Area Analysis of the Effect of Alcohol Outlet Density.” Journal of Studies on Alcohol, May 1999.

- Over-concentration of alcohol outlets is part of neighborhood economic and social disintegration. The area’s economic base loses its diversity and becomes less attractive to both residents and potential retail customers. The proliferation of alcohol outlets is thus both a symptom of economic decline and a factor that worsens the decline.

Source: Maxwell, A. & Immergluck, D. “Liquorlining: Liquor Store Concentration and Community Development in Lower-Income Cook County (IL) Neighborhoods.” Chicago IL: Woodstock Institute, 1997.



# University Study Tracks More Than 100 Bars Near Majority of Campuses

Harvard study confirms link between alcohol outlet density and drinking among students. New findings from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) confirm a strong correlation between frequent and risky drinking behavior among students and a high saturation of alcohol outlets — bars and liquor stores — within two miles of their campuses.

The study focused on alcohol outlet density at eight colleges participating in the American Medical Association's, "A Matter of Degree" (AMOD) program — a national effort to reduce high-risk drinking on college campuses. The study is published in the first quarterly issue of the international journal *Health and Place* (Volume 9, Number 1), and was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Findings were based on data collected from eight universities known for high rates of binge drinking. Researchers used listings of local alcohol licenses and electronic mapping tools to calculate neighborhood alcohol outlet density. Comparisons were made between outlet density and 1999 CAS reports of student drinking. The findings showed that in areas where alcohol density was highest, students drank more and had more drinking-related problems.

"Some colleges have a very tough time fighting unsafe and harmful drinking given the heavy concentration of alcohol outlets in their own backyards," said Elissa Weitzman, Sc.D., lead author of the article. "An effect of high density may be greater competition among bars, so alcohol is accessible everywhere and is offered to young people at heavily discounted prices. We think this is what links density to unsafe student drinking."

In this study, heavy drinking is defined as consuming five or more drinks at an off-campus party in the past 30 days. Frequent drinking is defined as consuming alcohol on ten or more occasions during the past 30 days. Drinking-related problems are defined as drinkers who report problems associated with one's own drinking habits.

The findings suggest practical solutions for college administrators, community officials and local law enforcement.

Researchers point out that reducing the number of alcohol outlets may be an important component in preventing frequent and heavy drinking and its harmful effects. They urge college towns to address the role of outlet density in drinking through public discussion between local officials and business owners. For example, communities can actively debate restricting and supervising alcohol licensing to bars and liquor stores, and limiting promotions of alcohol to students.

"Colleges can't win the battle to reduce students' risky drinking behavior by themselves. They need help from communities in limiting the number of bars and liquor stores near campuses," said Henry Wechsler, Ph.D., co-author of the article and principal investigator of the CAS.

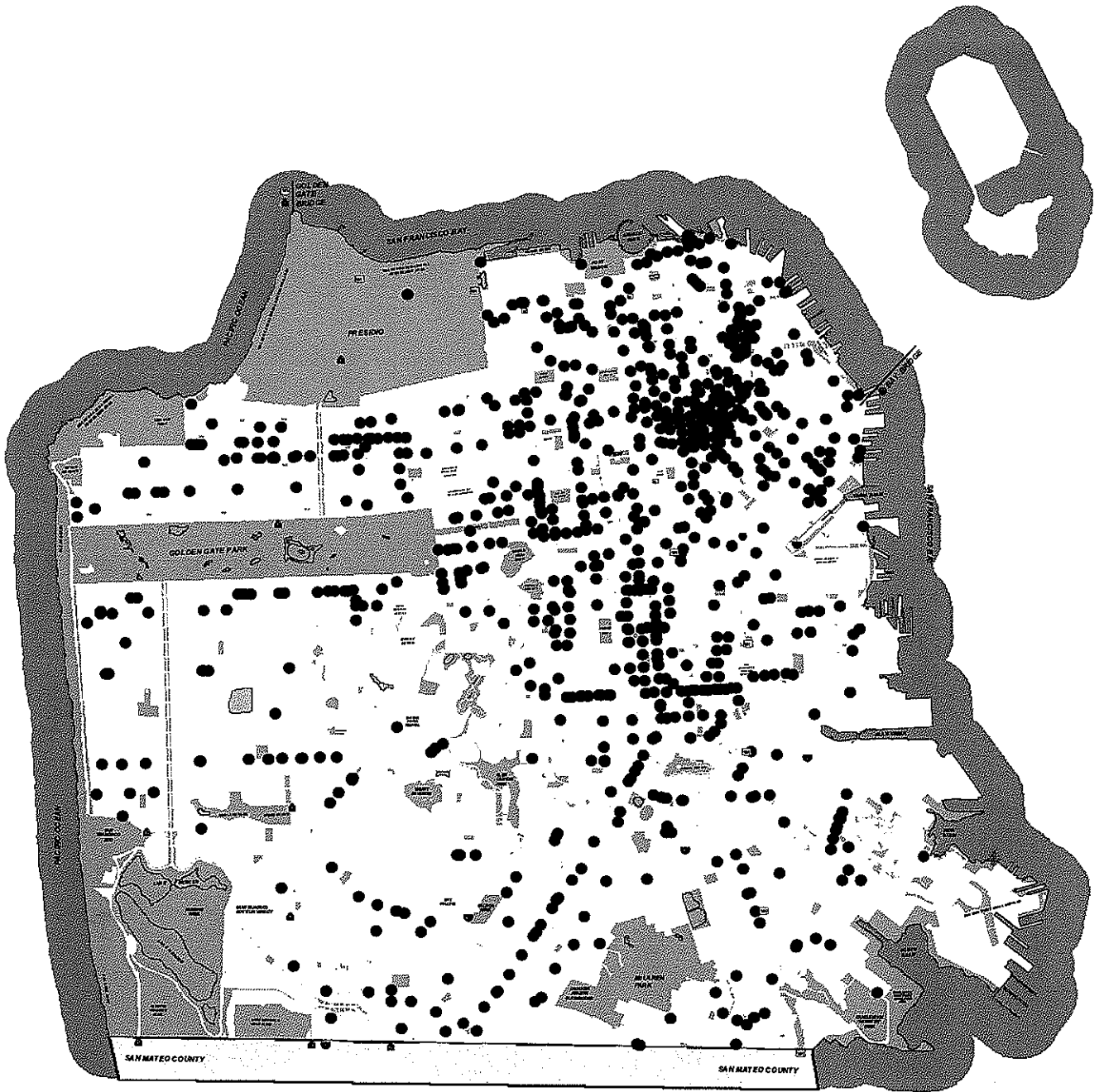
The research shows that alcohol licensing varied considerably from state to state. In addition, there were gaps in the quality of license information from state and local licensing boards. Researchers say this presents yet another area of discussion for local officials.

"Some could argue that bars bring money into the community, but residents need to decide if the costs of frequent and heavy college drinking outweigh the benefits," said Weitzman. "Community residents need to ask themselves if they are willing to accept a high saturation of bars in their town and the negative effects it will have on their quality of life."

Co-authors of the article, "The Relationship of Alcohol Outlet Density to Heavy and Frequent Drinking and Drinking-Related Problems among College Students at Eight Universities," include: Alison Folkman, M.P.H.; Kerry Lemieux Folkman, B.Sc.



# Sample Density of Off-Premise Alcohol Outlets



● Off-premise alcohol outlet\*

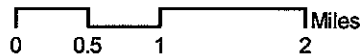


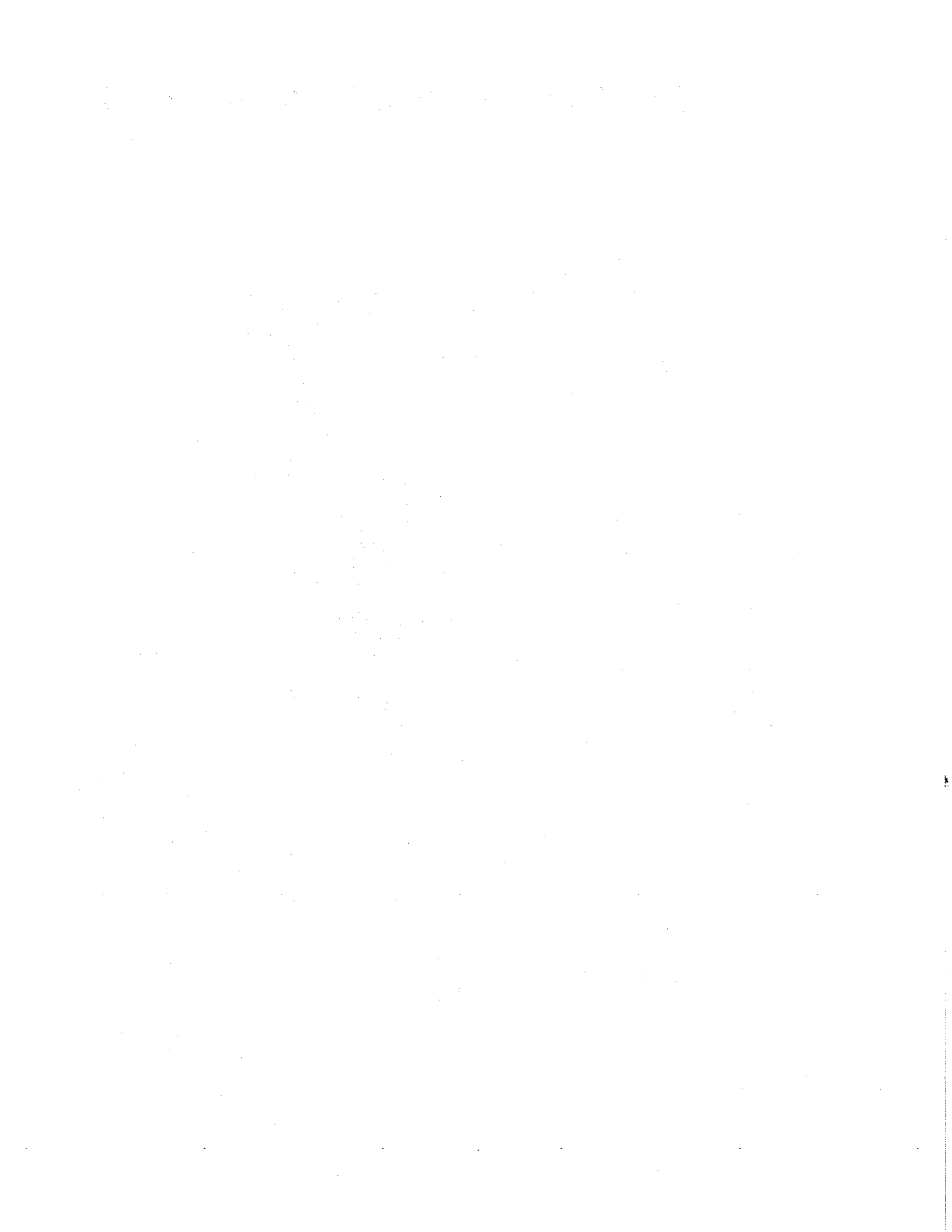
Source: California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, 2009

*\*Off-premise alcohol outlets are retail establishments authorized to sell beer, wine and/or distilled spirits for consumption off the premises where sold.*

City and County of San Francisco  
Department of Public Health  
Environmental Health Section

Available at [www.thehdmt.org](http://www.thehdmt.org)





# Density of Off-Premise\* Alcohol Outlets (2009)

Neighborhood	Square Mileage	Number of Off-Premise Alcohol Outlets	Density of Off-Premise Alcohol Outlets Per Square Mile	Off-Premise Alcohol Outlets per 1,000 Population
<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>47.15</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Bayview	4.89	30	6.1	0.9
Bernal Heights	1.17	23	19.7	0.9
Castro/Upper Market	0.86	29	33.7	1.6
Chinatown	0.13	21	161.5	3
Crocker Amazon	0.47	5	10.6	0.4
Diamond Heights	0.34	1	2.9	0.2
Downtown/Civic Center	0.64	77	120.3	2.1
Excelsior	1.6	21	13.1	0.6
Financial District	0.69	29	42	4.8
Glen Park	0.37	4	10.8	0.9
Golden Gate Park	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Haight Ashbury	0.76	34	44.7	1.7
Inner Richmond	1.31	31	23.7	0.9
Inner Sunset	1.33	15	11.3	0.6
Lakeshore	3.65	4	1.1	0.2
Marina	0.97	25	25.8	1.2
Mission	1.73	96	55.5	1.7
Nob Hill	0.37	27	73	1.2
Noe Valley	0.9	22	24.4	1.3
North Beach	0.63	39	61.9	3.3
Ocean View	1.34	12	9	0.5
Outer Mission	1.38	16	11.6	0.7
Outer Richmond	1.36	28	20.6	0.9
Outer Sunset	2.44	24	9.8	0.5
Pacific Heights	0.67	17	25.4	1.1
Parkside	1.51	15	9.9	0.7
Potrero Hill	1.37	19	13.9	1.8
Presidio	2.38	1	0.4	0.4
Presidio Heights	0.44	4	9.1	0.5
Russian Hill	0.48	20	41.7	1.2
Seacliff	0.72	3	4.2	0.9
South of Market	2.11	65	30.8	2.8
Treasure Island/YBI	0.89	0	0	0
Twin Peaks	0.66	0	0	0
Visitacion Valley	1.48	13	8.8	0.6
West of Twin Peaks	1.89	14	7.4	0.8
Western Addition	1.52	66	43.4	1.4

\*Off-premise alcohol outlets are those authorized by the State of California to sell all types of alcoholic beverages for consumption off the premises in original, sealed containers, such as grocery stores, liquor stores, mini-marts and package stores. This excludes restaurants, bars and other types of facilities where alcohol is consumed on-site.





# Sample Letter to the Editor – Limiting the Location and Density of Alcohol Outlets

Note: Follow the instructions in the opinion section of your local newspaper for submitting a letter to the editor. Most newspapers print these instructions in the opinion-editorial section, or you can call the newspaper for instructions.

## **ISSUE: Limiting the Location and Density of Alcohol Outlets in Our Community**

I'm writing to express my concern about the number of locations where alcohol can be purchased in our community. For the purposes of this letter, I'll refer to them as "alcohol outlets."

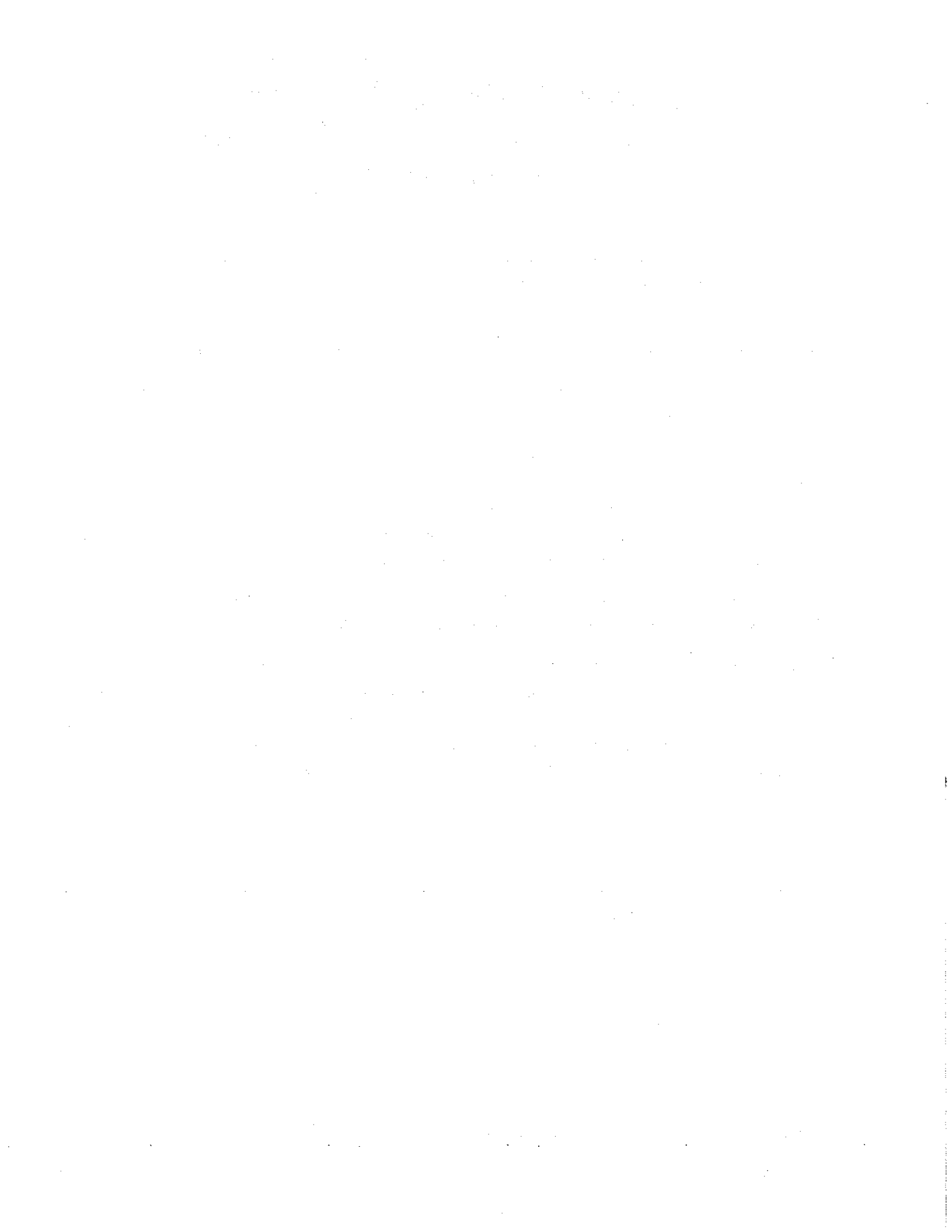
Research shows that communities with more alcohol outlets tend to experience more alcohol-related problems including: alcohol-related civil offenses, motor vehicle crashes, assaults, vandalism, domestic violence, alcohol addiction and underage drinking. One study conducted in New Orleans found that the density of alcohol outlets in a neighborhood accounted for an 11-percent difference in a person's drinking habits. In short, the farther people lived from an alcohol outlet, the less they drank.

[IF A COMMUNITY GROUP HAS RECENTLY CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF THEIR OWN NEIGHBORHOODS ... SUMMARIZE THE SURVEY AND FINDINGS OF ANY LOCAL EFFORTS ...]

This is particularly disturbing when we consider the alcohol outlets in our community and their proximity to our children. In order to reduce underage drinking and all of its related problems, we need to create some safe distances between our kids and alcohol outlets. Let's work together to create these distances, especially around our schools, public parks, churches and community facilities. If you'd like to join the effort, contact [YOU MAY WANT TO MENTION YOUR GROUP'S NAME HERE].

Sincerely,

Include your name and your group's name here



# Sample News Release – Location and Density of Alcohol Outlets

Note: Send this release to the local news editor at your newspaper. Call the newspaper for the editor's name and for instructions on submitting the release.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Community Survey Shows Link Between Alcohol Outlets and Crime**

A recent survey of our community confirms what many of us already know: communities with more places to purchase alcohol tend to experience more alcohol-related problems. Our community group [ADD GROUP NAME, IF APPLICABLE] has just completed an informal survey and mapping of both alcohol outlets and alcohol-related crimes in our area. Here are the results.

[PROVIDE A BRIEF SUMMARY OF YOUR SURVEY FINDINGS, INCLUDING WHEN, WHERE AND HOW YOU CONDUCTED YOUR SURVEY]

[ALSO PROVIDE THE DETAILS OF YOUR WORK WITH LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT HERE]

[CONCLUDE THE RELEASE WITH A STATEMENT FROM YOUR GROUP'S LEADER, AND/OR FROM THE LOCAL POLICE CHIEF]

We've worked together to hit the streets and actually map out where alcohol is being sold and served in our community. What we've learned is that alcohol-related problems occur more often in these areas. Now that we have this information, let's work together to make our streets safer for ourselves and our families.

For more information, contact: [INSERT YOUR NAME AND PHONE NUMBER]



# Sample Op-Ed Piece – Limiting the Location and Density of Alcohol Outlets

Note: Contact a community leader and ask him or her to customize the following op-ed piece for submission to your local newspaper.

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