

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, are associated with reduced alcohol-related accidents, and impose penalties on the licensed establishment rather than just the server. By decreasing alcohol availability, compliance checks are believed to also reduce alcohol-related problems and crime among youth. Nationally, an estimated 8.6 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., Web sites and email 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 youth motor vehicle crashes;
- ▶ Rates of youth arrested and convicted of driving under the influence;

- ▶ Self-report of underage drinking and drunk driving;
- ▶ Perceived likelihood of being caught driving with an illegal blood alcohol level;
- ▶ Awareness of impaired driving and zero tolerance laws; and
- ▶ Degree of support from merchants.

Resources Supporting Action

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>. The database allows law enforcement and community groups to track illegal sales to minors. The Center also offers:

- ▶ *The Guide to Responsible Alcohol Sales: Off Premise Clerk, Licensee and Manager Training*;
- ▶ *Preventing Sales of Alcohol to Minors: What You Should Know About Merchant Education Programs*; and
- ▶ *Strategies for Reducing Third-Party Transactions of Alcohol to Underage Youth*.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Preventing Underage Drinking Using the SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework and Getting To Outcomes® To Achieve Results*. Check the SAMHSA Store at <http://store.samhsa.gov> for availability. This publication includes planning, implementation, and evaluation tools related to alcohol compliance checks.

SAMHSA, *Focus on Prevention*, from <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA10-4120/SMA10-4120.pdf>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit*, from http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf.