Environmental Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems:

A Resource Guide

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Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 3

General Resources on the Environmental Prevention Approach ........................................ 3

Resources Related to Sonoma County Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Priority Areas and Goals ................................................................. 5

  Priority Area 1: Reduction of Underage Drinking and Related Problems ................................................................. 6

  Priority Area 2: Reduction of High-Risk Adult Drinking and Related Problems ................................................................. 11

  Priority Area 3: Reduction of Methamphetamine Use and Related Problems ................................................................. 14
Introduction

Much of the research on the effectiveness of environmental or policy interventions to reduce alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems has been reported in the form of individual journal articles, with many of the studies conducted in Scandinavia and other European countries where alcohol control policies have been in place for some time. However, over the last 20 years, with the growing reliance on population-based approaches to reduce alcohol problems, research on the efficacy of this approach has expanded significantly in the United States.

As the body of domestic and foreign research has grown, governments and other health organizations have both funded research and conducted meta-analysis to assist decision makers with selecting and implementing promising or best-practice strategies that have strong potential to produce predicted outcomes.

General Resources on the Environmental Prevention Approach

The following resources reflect both a general overview of the theoretical underpinning of the environmental approach as well as current understanding of what strategies constitute promising or best practice. It should be noted that the field of environmental prevention of alcohol and other drug problems is still evolving. Communities, in an on-going effort to address complex and intractable substance abuse issues, are constantly adapting existing strategies and applying them to new manifestations of problems. Research generally lags behind community implementation. This is true, in part, because of the methodologically complex nature of environmental evaluation and the time and resources it takes to conduct sound research as well as the speed in which communities try new approaches that are grounded in the research principles, but not yet formally evaluated.

The sources below, listed sequentially from the most recently published, will provide a comprehensive understanding of the environmental approach, which interventions are proven to work, which have strong promise, and which do not have evidence of effectiveness. A copy of each of the resources cited in this resource guide is available at the Sonoma County Department of Health Services (DHS), Prevention and Planning Division office and in some cases is posted on the DHS website.

Policy Strategies to Reduce Underage and Binge Drinking. Sandra Hoover, Center for Applied Research Solutions, Inc (CARS)
URL: http://www.ca-cpi.org/TARP/Policy_final.pdf

This booklet provides a short overview of best-practice to reduce underage drinking. Discussion of policy strategies including: 1) Increasing the price of alcohol, 2) Reducing access and availability, 3) Addressing social availability, 4) Restricting alcohol advertising and promotions, and 5) Changing social norms, is provided to guide local practitioners.

This is the report of the Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking, formed by the National Research Council at the request of the U.S. Congress in 2002. This landmark work explores underage drinking, what can be done to prevent it, what will work and who is responsible for making it happen. Reducing Underage Drinking provides a wide-ranging series of recommendations each of which is based on sound evidence and research.


The book opens with an introduction to the policy agenda. The second section presents a snapshot of drinking patterns and alcohol-related problems throughout the world. The third section reviews the evidence for six strategies that have often been used as a basis for alcohol policy: 1) Taxation and pricing, 2) Regulating the physical availability of alcohol, 3) Modifying the drinking context, 4) Drinking-driving countermeasures, 5) Regulating alcohol promotion, 6) Education and persuasion programs, followed by a discussion of treatment and early intervention services. Section four provides an international analysis of the policy making process. The book concludes with a consumer's guide to effective alcohol policy, synthesizing what is known about how communities and nation states can effectively manage alcohol.


This document identifies the various types of laws and policies that can be used to restrict minors' access to alcohol and to enhance the enforcement of underage drinking laws. The characteristics of well-crafted community interventions are described and common loopholes are pointed out. The information can be used to identify needed changes in legislation and opportunities for better enforcement.

**Preventing Problems Related to Alcohol Availability: Environmental Approaches (Practitioners' Guide).** Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse
This practitioner's guide focuses on research and practice evidence for key environmental approaches to the prevention of problems related to alcohol availability. It evaluates six approaches: 1) Preventing availability to underage youth, 2) Raising alcohol taxes and prices, 3) Responsible Beverage Service, 4) changing the conditions of availability, 5) Changing hours and days of sale, and 6) community-based prevention approaches.


This book pre-dates Alcohol: *No Ordinary Commodity*. It presents a critical and informed perspective on alcoholism and its management. It provides an appraisal of the nature and extent of society's alcohol problems and then explores how scientific findings assist in the design of more effective policy responses. Also covered is the efficacy of different types of prevention strategy, including pricing, licensing and control of access, drunk driving counter-measures, public education, and the treatment contribution. A final chapter succinctly outlines how these analyses assist in the making of informed policy choices.

**Center for Substance Abuse Prevention: Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies**

CSAP's Western CAPT is organized to provide useful, efficient, cost-effective, and culturally sensitive prevention application services through a comprehensive system that matches services to the technological capabilities and capacity of prevention programs. To accomplish these goals, Prevention Application Management Coordinators work with the Single State Agency prevention programs to develop plans designed to assist programs in applying scientifically-defensible prevention strategies. A network of local and regional technical assistance experts, skill development activities, innovative uses of electronic media, and a resource repository is available to communities.

URL: [http://captus.samhsa.gov/western/about/index.cfm](http://captus.samhsa.gov/western/about/index.cfm)

**Resources Related to Sonoma County AOD Prevention**

**Priority Areas and Goals:**

This section provides a more detailed description of various environmental and policy options as they apply to the AOD prevention priority areas and goals adopted by the County in the *Sonoma County Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Framework: Strategic Plan for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention 2007-2010*. In each case, the evidence base pertinent to the option is included.
Priority Area 1: Reduction of Underage Drinking and Related Problems

Goal 1: Reduce alcohol-related problems associated with retail access to alcohol

Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:

1. Deemed Approved Ordinances
   Deemed Approved Ordinances are a powerful nuisance abatement tool designed to address public health and safety problems created by alcohol outlets...both on-sale (bars, restaurants, etc) and off-sale (markets, supermarkets, drug-stores, etc). It changes the legal status of existing alcohol beverage establishments, granting them “Deemed Approved” status, permitting them to operate as usual as long as they do not create a public nuisance or violate any state or local laws. Any administrative sanctions against an outlet occur at the city or county level. The law enforcement and administrative costs associated with the Deemed Approved Ordinance are funded by an annual fee collected from alcohol outlet businesses.

Resources
  http://books.nap.edu/execsumm_pdf/10729.pdf
  http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10729.html

2. “Shoulder Tap” Enforcement
   Shoulder tapping refers to the practice used by minors to obtain alcohol from strangers near off-sale retail outlets. Minors will wait outside the premises (in the parking lot or on the sidewalk), approach adults who are about to enter, and request that the adult purchase alcohol for them. The young person may offer the adult a fee or a portion of the alcohol purchased in exchange for conducting the transaction. Carrying out shoulder tap enforcement is the responsibility of local police, sheriff and ABC. Coalitions can work collaboratively with these enforcement agencies to build community support for on-going enforcement activities.

Resources:
  http://books.nap.edu/execsumm_pdf/10729.pdf
  http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10729.html

- Regulatory Strategies for Preventing Youth Access to Alcohol: Best Practices. Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (See Best Practice #13)

- Policy Strategies to Reduce Underage and Binge Drinking. Sandra
3. **Reducing Theft of Alcohol in Alcohol Outlets by Youth**

Local surveys indicate that theft in off-sale alcohol outlets is a major source of youth alcohol availability in Sonoma County. There is little research literature on the efficacy of reducing youth theft of alcohol as a prevention strategy. Research does suggest, however, that strategies designed to reduce youth access to alcohol can reduce youth consumption.

**Resources:**

  
  http://books.nap.edu/execsumm_pdf/10729.pdf
  
  http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10729.html

4. **Conditional Use Permit Ordinances**

Cities and counties in California have the authority to place conditions on the operation of alcohol outlets, both on-sale and off-sale. The authority granting local municipalities to use the conditional use permit (CUP) for regulating alcohol outlets is granted by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) code, Sec. 23790-23791. The CUP is a particularly powerful tool in regulating the overall availability of alcohol by requiring spacing or distance requirement between outlets, regulating proximity to sensitive land uses such as a schools, churches, parks, and residential neighborhoods, and allowing outlets only in specific areas of the city or county. CUPs also can be used to effectively address problems of crime and violence by structuring land use to allow less density of outlets and by holding merchants accountable for operating conditions in and around their premises.

**Resources**

- *Policy Strategies to Reduce Underage and Binge Drinking.* Sandra Hoover, Center for Applied Research Solutions, Inc (CARS)
  
  http://www.ca-cpi.org/TARP/Policy_final.pdf

- *Regulatory Strategies for Preventing Youth Access to Alcohol: Best Practices.* Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (see Best Practice # 2)
  

  

- *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and Public Policy.* Oxford University Press (see Chapter 7) Also see PowerPoint summary of Book by Sally Caswell.
  
  http://www.eurocare.org/btg/conf0604/presentations/caswellpp.pdf

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**Goal 2: Reduce alcohol-related problems associated with social access to alcohol**
Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:

1. Social Host Ordinances

Social host liability occurs at the level of local government in the form of municipal (city or county) ordinances called “response costs recovery” ordinances. In general, these laws hold social hosts (including tenants) and landowners (including landlords) civilly responsible for the costs of law enforcement, fire, or other emergency response services associated with multiple responses to the scene of an underage drinking party or other gathering occurring on private property, whether or not the hosts or landowners had knowledge of the occurrence of the parties or gatherings.

Resources:

- Policy Strategies to Reduce Underage and Binge Drinking. Sandra Hoover, Center for Applied Research Solutions, Inc (CARS)  
  http://www.ca-cpi.org/TARP/Policy_final.pdf

  http://books.nap.edu/execsumm_pdf/10729.pdf 
  http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10729.html

- Regulatory Strategies for Preventing Youth Access to Alcohol: Best Practices. Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (see Best Practice # 14)  

2. Parent Pledge Campaigns

Parents play a central and important role in influencing their children’s alcohol use. They control the availability of alcohol in the household, serve as role models of alcohol use, influence family and community norms on alcohol use, and set alcohol-related expectations for their children. The Parent Pledge Campaign has 3 important elements, asking parents to: 1) sign a pledge, taking responsibility for keeping alcohol out of the hands of minors in their homes, 2) consider being listed in a directory of parents who have signed the pledge, and 3) support community-wide policy efforts to reduce availability of alcohol to youth.

Resources:

- Policy Strategies to Reduce Underage and Binge Drinking. Sandra Hoover, Center for Applied Research Solutions, Inc (CARS)  
  http://www.ca-cpi.org/TARP/Policy_final.pdf

- Alcohol Policy and the Public Good. Edward, et al. Oxford Medical Publications (see section 8.2) Summary of book can be found at:  
  http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre/PressBackgrounders/2001/2001_1002_2

3. Community Events Policies on the Promotion, Sales and Service of Alcohol

Alcohol restrictions at community events include policies that control the availability and use of alcohol at public venues, such as concerts, street fairs and sporting events. These policies may reduce youth access and the occurrence of alcohol-related problems such as binge drinking, sales to minors, traffic crashes, vandalism, fighting, and other public disturbances.
Goal 3: Reduce youth exposure to alcohol marketing and promotional activities

Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:

1. **ABC Enforcement of Existing Laws**
   Effective and consistent enforcement includes regular compliance checks of alcohol retailers to ensure conformity with Retail Operating Standards (ROS) that have been codified in state law (also known as the "Lee Law"). This strategy was chosen to improve retail practices at off-sale alcohol outlets, insure compliance with mandated advertising restrictions are in place and, as a result, decrease crime, nuisance, loitering, graffiti and other community problems related to the sale of alcohol.

   **Resources:**

2. **Voluntary Marketing Policies**
   A substantial proportion of alcohol advertising reaches an underage audience and is presented in a style that is attractive to youths. This advertising occurs in retail settings such as alcohol outlets and through electronic media such as television. In light of constitutional constraints on direct advertising restrictions, and to enable the industry to be responsive to public concerns about advertising, the most fruitful governmental response would be to facilitate public awareness of advertising practices.
3. Policies for Advertising at Community Events

Sponsorship of sports, community festivals, and arts events is another vehicle for reaching various audiences. Advertising content, as noted above, glamorizes drinking and reinforces the concept of alcohol as intrinsic to social interaction.

Resources:

4. Targeting Alcohol Promotions on Local Radio Stations

The alcohol industry is continually looking to attract new consumers and present their products to larger and larger segments of the younger drinking population. In the last few years alcohol advertising dollars have been moving into radio advertising markets on stations that target younger audiences. Decreasing the amount of alcohol advertising reaching this audience may impact consumption rates.

Resources:

Goal 4: Increase capacity of schools, parents, and community organizations to promote healthy development of youth and to prevent problems associated with youth alcohol use

Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:

1. Evidence-based AOD Curriculum in Middle Schools

The goal of most school-based alcohol education programs is to change the adolescent’s drinking and drug beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, and to modify factors such as general social skills and self-esteem that are assumed to underlie adolescent drinking. The evidence is mixed on the efficacy of school-based programs ability to influence actual substance use. Community
coalitions have an important role to play in working with school districts to ensure the education programs are best-practice, implemented with fidelity and broadly implemented in middle-schools.

Resources:
- *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and Public Policy*. Oxford University Press (see Chapter 7) Also see PowerPoint summary of Book by Sally Caswell.
  http://www.eurocare.org/btg/conf0604/presentations/caswellpp.pdf

2. **Youth-Serving Organizations Addressing AOD Issues**
Influencing the way people think about alcohol and their willingness to support community standards and policies that decrease overall alcohol availability is a key component of broad-based community alcohol education. This is a promising strategy without clear evidence of efficacy.

Resources:
- *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and Public Policy*. Oxford University Press (see Chapter 7) Also see PowerPoint summary of Book by Sally Caswell.
  http://www.eurocare.org/btg/conf0604/presentations/caswellpp.pdf

3. **Parent Education**
Parent education involves sharing information and skills parents need to reduce risks to their families and increase protective factors. It may take place in formal sessions (such as parent education workshops) or in informal settings (such as conversations with parents at community gatherings). Some parent education programs are specifically structured to address substance abuse and family violence, help family members communicate with their children, handle stress and develop coping skills in the face of adversity. Working collaboratively with local service providers to expand community capacity for parent education is one of many roles community coalitions assume.

Resources:
- *Science-Based Prevention programs and Principles 2002: Effective Substance Abuse and Mental health Programs for Every Community*. Department of Health and Human Services (CSAP)

**Priority Area 2: Reduction of High-Risk Adult Drinking and Related Problems**

**Goal 1: Reduce alcohol-related problems associated with retail availability of alcohol**

**Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:**

1. **Responsible Beverage Service Programs**
Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) is a strategy that educates the servers and sellers of alcoholic beverages on the laws governing its sale, techniques to reduce sales to minors and obviously intoxicated individuals and principles of customer service. RBS training is available to on-sale (bars and
Restaurants) and off-sale (liquor stores, supermarkets, convenience stores, etc) merchants.

RBS has been shown to effectively reduce alcohol sales to minors and reduce rates of drinking and driving in on-sale establishments. There are also data to suggest that RBS training can be an effective strategy for off-sale alcohol outlets. However, while RBS training has been demonstrated to be an effective prevention strategy, its ability to reduce problem rates is directly linked to the merchants perceived level of local police and state liquor enforcement of laws.

**Resources:**
- *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and Public Policy.* Oxford University Press (see Chapter 7) Also see PowerPoint summary of Book by Sally Caswell.
- *Alcohol Policy and the Public Good.* Edward, et al. Oxford Medical Publications (see section 8.2) Summary of book can be found at:
  [http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre/PressBackgrounders/2001/20011002_2](http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre/PressBackgrounders/2001/20011002_2)

2. **Compliance Fee Ordinance**

Numerous municipalities have enacted fee ordinances that fund local compliance checks, shoulder tap operations and responsible beverage service training. Generally these fees are paid by on-sale and off-sale alcohol outlets as part of a Deemed Approved Ordinance or other alcohol beverage sales ordinance at the local level. These fees support the evidence-based program interventions of on-going and consistent enforcement of state and local alcohol beverage laws and responsible beverage service training.

**Resources:**
Resources on law enforcement compliance checks, shoulder tap operations and responsible beverage service can be found in Priority Area #1, Goals #1 & #3 and Priority Area #1 Goal #1 above.

3. **Land Use and Nuisance Abatement Controls on Outlets**

Conditional Use Permit ordinance and Deemed Approved ordinances are the principle policy tools associated with expanded land use and nuisance abatement of alcohol outlets.

**Resources:**
See Priority Area #1, Goal #1 for resources for Deemed Approved and Conditional Use Permit ordinances.
Goal 2: Reduce alcohol-related problems associated with social availability of alcohol

Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:

1. **DUI Social Marketing Campaigns**

   Drinking and driving continues to be a significant problem in communities. The degree to which driving under the influence (DUI) is considered acceptable in a community is, in part, a function of the level of community dialogue and public awareness of the issue. Social marketing campaigns designed to increase public perception that they will be apprehended if drinking and driving coupled with on-going and consistent DUI enforcement can reduce rates of drinking and driving.

   **Resources:**

2. **DUI Enforcement**

   There is considerable evidence demonstrating a link between level of DUI enforcement and rates of drinking and driving. Research demonstrates that consistent enforcement coupled with swift punishment can drive rates of DUI down.

   **Resources:**

3. **Community Mobilization and Organizing**

   Community mobilizing serves to raise awareness of community problems and serves as a precursor to a change in organizational priorities and policy
change. There is ample evidence demonstrating that organizing the community is fundamental to effecting change.

Resources:
- Science-Based Prevention programs and Principles 2002: Effective Substance Abuse and Mental health Programs for Every Community. Department of Health and Human Services (CSAP) (see ‘Community Trials to Reduce High-Risk Drinking” and “ Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol”)

Goal 3: Reduce alcohol-related problems associated with community events

Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:
1. Special Events Policies and Facilities Events Policies
   Special events and facilities policies are designed to regulate how, when and where alcohol may be sold and served in settings that have the potential to generate alcohol-related problems. These policies are designed to restrict the physical availability of alcohol and typically include provisions for responsible beverage service, drink size, hours of sale, requirements for food service, security provisions, and other factors found to reduce alcohol problems.

Resources:

Priority Area 3: Reduction of Methamphetamine Use and Related Problems

Goal 1: Increase community awareness of the availability and harms related to methamphetamine use

Policy/Environmental Options:
1. School-Based Education
   Evidence-based school curricula have been shown to reduce drug use in youth. Similar to alcohol, programs should focus on social skills and self-esteem issues that are assumed to underlie adolescent drug use.

Resources:

• National Institute on Drug Abuse http://www.drugabuse.gov/STRC/Role5.html

2. **Social Marketing Campaigns**

Research on the effectiveness of social marketing strategies to reduce methamphetamine use is limited. While there is a greater body of evidence on the impacts of media campaigns to prevent DUI, reduce tobacco use and more generally alcohol use, there are very preliminary promising findings related to methamphetamine. Communities across the country are instituting media campaigns in their comprehensive prevention strategy. Subsequent evaluations of these campaigns will yield much needed information on their efficacy.

**Resources:**


- Partnership for Drug-Free America, in collaboration with the Missouri Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MOAPP) and Media United against Substance Abuse (MUSA). [http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/148/12/1262](http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/148/12/1262)

**Goal 2: Disrupt neighborhood-level distribution and sales of methamphetamine**

**Policy/Environmental Options:**

1. **Neighborhood-level Community Organizing**

   Effective use of neighborhood-level community organizing to secure and re-claim neighborhoods where drug use and sales are occurring has been documented in the literature on the benefits of neighborhood-level collective efficacy and social capital.


**Goal 3: Reduce availability of drug paraphernalia in retail alcohol outlets**

**Policy/Environmental Options:**

1. **ABC Enforcement of Existing Laws**

   Current law prohibits the sale and distribution of materials considered drug paraphernalia in alcohol outlets. Included in the definition of drug
paraphernalia are “chore boys” glass rose vials, stamp bags, etc. On-going
ABC and local law enforcement in alcohol outlets has been demonstrated
as an effective approach to insuring merchant compliance with existing
laws.

Resources:
• See Priority Area #1, Goal #3 for information on efficacy of
  enforcement efforts.

Goal 4: Reduce the number of public settings where methamphetamine use is occurring

Policy/Environmental Prevention Options:
1. Law Enforcement Intervention
Research suggests that police can make significant impacts on crime if
resources are focused on specific objectives, tasks, places, times and people.
Directed patrols, proactive arrests and problem-solving at high-crime "hot
spots" has shown substantial evidence of crime prevention. Focused efforts to
reduce methamphetamine use in known hot spot areas may impact overall
use rates. Building community support for strong enforcement and advocating
for sufficient resources are important coalition functions.

Resources:
• Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn’t, What’s Promising. A
  Report to the United States. Prepared for the National Institute of
  Justice (see chapter 8)
  
  http://www.ncjrs.gov/works/