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Problem-Specific Guides Series  
No. 27



# Underage Drinking

Kelly Dedel

[www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)



Center for  
Problem-Oriented Policing



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Problem-Specific Guides Series  
Guide No. 27**

## Underage Drinking

Kelly Dedel

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The Internet references cited in this publication were valid as of August 2010. Given that URLs and web sites are in constant flux, neither the author(s) nor the COPS Office can vouch for their current validity.

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## About the Problem-Specific Guide Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. Neither do they cover all of the technical details about how to implement specific responses. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who:

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series of *Problem-Solving Tools* guides has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)
- **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.



- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem. (A companion series of *Response Guides* has been produced to help you understand how commonly-used police responses work on a variety of problems.)
- **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
- **Are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public bodies including other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual citizens. An effective



problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular individuals or groups in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that individuals and groups other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so. Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*, provides further discussion of this topic.

The COPS Office defines community policing as “a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.” These guides emphasize *problem-solving* and *police-community partnerships* in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate problem-solving and police-community partnerships vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

Each guide is informed by a thorough review of the research literature and reported police practice, and each guide is anonymously peer-reviewed by a line police officer, a police executive and a researcher prior to publication. The review process is independently managed by the COPS Office, which solicits the reviews.



For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org). This website offers free online access to:

- The *Problem-Specific Guides* series,
- The companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series,
- Special publications on crime analysis and on policing terrorism,
- Instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics,
- An interactive problem-oriented policing training exercise,
- An interactive *Problem Analysis Module*,
- Online access to important police research and practices, and
- Information about problem-oriented policing conferences and award programs.





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Cynthia E. Pappas oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Research for the guide was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University under the direction of Phyllis Schultze. Suzanne Fregly edited this guide.





# Contents

About the Problem-Specific Guide Series . . . . .	i
Acknowledgments . . . . .	v
The Problem of Underage Drinking . . . . .	1
Related Problems . . . . .	4
Factors Contributing to Underage Drinking . . . . .	5
Why Underage People Drink . . . . .	5
Environmental Reasons for Underage Drinking . . . . .	7
How Underage Drinkers Obtain Alcohol . . . . .	8
Where Underage Drinking Occurs . . . . .	10
Understanding Your Local Problem . . . . .	13
Asking the Right Questions . . . . .	13
Offenders . . . . .	14
Incidents . . . . .	14
Environment . . . . .	15
Alcohol Sources . . . . .	15
Times/Locations . . . . .	16
Special Events . . . . .	17
Current Responses . . . . .	17
Measuring Your Effectiveness . . . . .	18
Responses to the Problem of Underage Drinking . . . . .	19
General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy . . . . .	19
Specific Responses to Underage Drinking . . . . .	22
Responses That Target the Motivation to Drink . . . . .	22
Responses That Target Commercial Access to Alcohol . . . . .	24
Responses That Target Social Access to Alcohol . . . . .	31
Responses That Target Locations Where Drinking Occurs . . . . .	32
Responses That Focus on the Consequences of Underage Drinking . . . . .	37
Responses With Limited Effectiveness . . . . .	38
Appendix A: Summary of Responses to Underage Drinking . . . . .	41
Endnotes . . . . .	47
References . . . . .	51
About the Author . . . . .	59
Other Problem-Oriented Guides for Police . . . . .	61





## The Problem of Underage Drinking

This guide begins by describing the problem of underage drinking,<sup>§</sup> and reviewing factors that contribute to it. It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local underage drinking problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem, and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice.

Young people use alcohol more than any other drug, including tobacco.<sup>1</sup> Underage drinking—that is, drinking under the age of 21—is prohibited throughout the United States. Despite a historical lack of vigorous enforcement, minimum-drinking-age laws have been very effective in reducing many of the harms associated with underage drinking,<sup>2</sup> such as traffic fatalities and alcohol-related injuries, as well as assaults and other crimes. There is significant potential for further harm reduction if additional strategies targeting the factors underlying the problem are implemented.<sup>§§</sup>

Virtually all high school students and most college students are under 21. However, most drink alcohol at least occasionally, and many drink frequently and heavily.<sup>§§§</sup> They can get alcohol for free or at low prices, which contributes to their drinking at levels that significantly increase their risk of negative alcohol-related consequences.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of underage youth who drink has not changed significantly over the past decade in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, if anything, they are starting to drink at a younger age, and their drinking patterns are becoming more extreme.

§There are many labels used to describe underage drinking and its negative consequences. These include “binge drinking,” “high-risk drinking,” “heaving drinking,” and “risky drinking,” among others. Controversy about proper terminology comes from disagreement about how to quantify the amount of alcohol consumed and the time period in which it is consumed, and to what extent these measurements account for physical characteristics of the drinker (e.g., weight, gender) that are related to the effects of alcohol.

§§There are several national efforts to combat the problem: see the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s “Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws” program ([www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/compendium/2001/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/compendium/2001/contents.html)), the Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation web site ([www.udetc.org](http://www.udetc.org)), and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s “A Matter of Degree” program designed to discourage drinking on college campuses ([www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3558.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3558.html)).

§§§Recent surveys of U.S. high school and college students showed that one-half to three-quarters of high school students had tried alcohol (Johnston, O’Malley, and Bachman 2002) and two out of every three underage college students surveyed had drunk alcohol in the past 30 days (Wechsler 2001).



Underage drinkers experience a wide range of alcohol-related health, social, criminal justice, and academic problems. They do not all experience the same level of problems—those who drink more, and drink more often, suffer a greater number of negative consequences. However, negative consequences occur across a wide range of consumption levels and frequencies.

Young drinkers report a range of negative effects from alcohol, all of which can lead to troubled interactions with others, particularly police officers or other responsible adults who try to intervene.<sup>6</sup> These include the following:

- **Overconfidence and recklessness.** Excessive drinking may cause people to act in ways they would normally consider unwise or inappropriate.
- **Lack of awareness.** As people become intoxicated, they may not be fully aware of what is happening, and may not be able to figure out how to react to situations appropriately.
- **Aggression.** Drinkers may misread cues from other people as being offensive, and react violently.
- **Loss of control.** Drinkers' motor skills may become impaired, and drinkers may also lose control of their emotions.

These effects often lead young drinkers to come into contact with police, either as offenders or as victims. Youths who drink heavily are more likely to carry handguns than those who do not drink.<sup>7</sup> Alcohol use contributes to property damage, rape, and other violent crime on college campuses,<sup>8</sup> and about half of college crime victims have been drinking before the crime occurs.<sup>9</sup> A significant proportion of young drivers killed in car accidents are intoxicated when the crash occurs.<sup>10</sup>

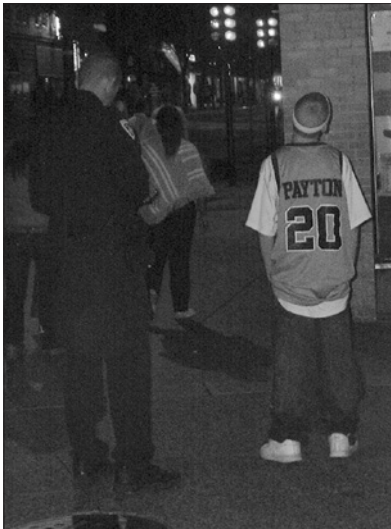


Further, underage college students who drink heavily are more likely to miss class, fall behind in school, sustain an injury, have unplanned or unprotected sex, drive after drinking, or have contact with campus police.<sup>11, §</sup> Students also experience “secondhand” effects of others’ alcohol misuse, such as having their sleep or study time interrupted; having to take care of an intoxicated friend; being insulted or humiliated by drinkers; receiving unwanted sexual advances; getting in serious arguments; having their personal property damaged; being assaulted, sexually or otherwise; and being raped by an acquaintance.<sup>12</sup> There are also a number of physical and mental health-related consequences of alcohol use, which are detailed elsewhere.<sup>§§</sup>

§While a number of studies reveal a correlation between alcohol consumption and negative or high-risk behavior (e.g., violent behavior, unprotected sexual activity), this relationship does not necessarily mean that alcohol causes these behaviors. Instead, there may be situational or personality factors underlying both the drinking and the high-risk behavior. For more information, see Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990).

§§For example, see National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2000), and Institute of Alcohol Studies (2003).

*David Corbett*



Despite widespread use, relatively few underage drinkers experience any legal or school-based consequences for their behavior.



Very few college students experience any college-based disciplinary action as a result of their drinking, despite widespread use and serious consequences for the individuals, their peers, and their communities.<sup>13</sup> The past decade has witnessed increased concern about and creativity in confronting the issue, and both adults and youths support measures to prevent underage drinking. Given the issue's complexity, it is important to understand how the problem takes shape in your community. Analyzing the factors that contribute to your local underage drinking problem will help you to select the most effective responses.

### **Related Problems**

Underage drinking is associated with a number of other problems not directly addressed in this guide, but many are covered in other guides in this series. These related problems require their own analyses and responses:

- Drunken driving
- Speeding in residential areas
- Cruising
- Disorderly conduct in public places
- Assaults in and around bars
- Acquaintance rape
- House parties
- Rave parties
- Vandalism
- Noise complaints in residential areas.





## **Factors Contributing to Underage Drinking**

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses.

### *Why Underage People Drink*

Some researchers have found that drinking, particularly among underage college students, “is often so routine that people find it difficult to explain why they do it.”<sup>14</sup> However, there are several common themes that appear to underlie underage drinking. Many see drinking as a “rite of passage,” or a fundamental part of adolescence and college life. Young people develop beliefs about the acceptability of underage drinking from their peers, parents, and other agents of informal social control.<sup>15</sup> Many young people believe that drinking will make it easier to be part of a group, reduce tension, relieve stress, help them to forget their worries, increase their sexual attractiveness, or make them more socially confident.<sup>16</sup> People who attribute such benefits to alcohol are more likely to drink than people who believe drinking has more negative consequences (e.g., loss of control, legal troubles, health problems).<sup>17</sup>

Young people often go out intending to get drunk, and may try to intensify their drunkenness by drinking a lot very quickly or drinking especially strong liquor. However, many young people unintentionally get drunk when they misjudge their limits.<sup>18</sup>



Many young people do not drink at all, or drink at minimal levels. Their decision not to drink or to drink in moderation appears to result from a combination of factors:<sup>19</sup>

- **Attachment.** Young people with strong ties to family, friends, and significant others tend to drink less. They have close emotional ties with others, and care about others' expectations and opinions regarding their behavior.
- **Commitment.** Young people who invest significant amounts of time, energy, and resources in conventional activities such as studying, working, taking part in organized religion, and/or participating in clubs or athletics tend to drink less than students who are not so invested, perhaps because they have less time available for alcohol-focused activities.
- **Belief.** Young people who accept conventional values, obey society's rules, and respect authority tend to drink less than those who do not.

In addition, much research suggests that young people—college students in particular—drink because they assume everyone else does.<sup>20</sup> Students consistently overestimate the amount that other students drink and the proportion of their fellow students who are heavy drinkers.<sup>21</sup> Given that adolescents and young adults are susceptible to peer pressure and want to conform, it is likely that their perceptions of others' alcohol use influence their own drinking, whether or not their perceptions are correct.



### *Environmental Reasons for Underage Drinking*

Underage drinking occurs in an environment saturated by alcohol advertising on television, on billboards, at sporting and music events, and in national and local newspapers. The alcohol industry spends far more to promote its products than is spent on public messages encouraging responsible drinking.<sup>22</sup> This media saturation may promote, facilitate, and perpetuate heavy drinking among young people. In addition, many products (e.g., alcopops, wine coolers) have hip, colorful, youth-oriented packaging and are likely to appeal mainly to young people.

In addition, young people, particularly those in college, are surrounded by outlets (e.g., grocery and convenience stores) that sell alcohol to be consumed elsewhere, or “off premises,” as well as “on-premises” outlets such as bars and restaurants. High concentrations of alcohol outlets are associated with higher rates of heavy drinking and drinking-related problems among college students.<sup>23</sup>

Alcohol outlets and advertisers team up to provide an additional incentive for underage drinking: price promotions and drink specials. In general, lower prices result in higher consumption levels across all age levels.<sup>24</sup> Price promotions offer discounts for high-volume purchases, such as kegs and cases of beer. College campuses near retailers that sell large volumes of low-price alcohol have higher rates of binge drinking than those campuses near outlets that do not sell discount alcohol.<sup>25</sup>

Many bars and restaurants have discount prices (e.g., during happy hour) and drink specials (e.g., two for one, ladies drink free) that encourage heavy drinking among all customers, some of whom may be underage.



*David Corbett*



Drink specials encourage heavy drinking among all customers, some of whom may be underage.

Many high school and college students say that they attend parties or go out drinking because “there is nothing else to do.” Like older adults, adolescents and young adults enjoy socializing and need a variety of avenues to interact with peers, make new friends, and pursue romantic relationships. In the absence of alcohol-free places to socialize, young people go to parties where alcohol is present, and may succumb to peer pressure to drink.

### *How Underage Drinkers Obtain Alcohol*

Underage drinkers obtain alcohol from two main sources: third parties, such as legal-age friends, siblings, and strangers; and commercial outlets, such as stores, bars, and restaurants (often by using a fake ID).<sup>26</sup>

Home is the primary source of alcohol among the youngest drinkers.<sup>27</sup> Some youth take alcohol from their parents’ liquor cabinets without their parents’ knowledge. Some parents supply their underage children with alcohol at special events such as graduations, weddings, or holiday parties.



Underage drinkers sometimes ask strangers to buy alcohol for them, often in exchange for a fee or a portion of the alcohol purchased. This practice is called “shoulder tapping”—underage youth wait outside a store and tap a stranger on the shoulder to make the request.<sup>28</sup>

Most underage drinkers report it is “very easy” to obtain alcohol; about one in four underage college students report that they can buy alcohol without age verification, or with a fake ID.<sup>29</sup> Studies of alcohol purchases across the country reveal that, depending on the location and the environmental context, 40 to 90 percent of retail outlets have sold alcohol to underage buyers.<sup>30</sup>

In some cases, retailers do not ask for ID. In others, underage drinkers present an ID card that has been altered to indicate they are of legal drinking age, or an ID card that belongs to someone who is of legal drinking age. The underage drinker may resemble the person in the photograph, or may substitute his or her own picture and relaminate the card. People can purchase fake IDs on the Internet, buy them directly from counterfeiters, or use fraudulent documents to get a driver’s license. Recent advancements in technology have made the counterfeiting of state-issued ID cards easier, using a scanner and a color printer.<sup>31</sup> Use of fake IDs is more common in urban areas and in states without consistent enforcement of underage purchase laws.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, young people are more likely to obtain and use a fake ID if they think their peers support the practice.<sup>33</sup>



### *Where Underage Drinking Occurs*

Underage people drink at a variety of locations, including the following:

- **Parties in private residences.** Large numbers of young people may gather in a home, often while the parents are away, or in a college student's off-campus residence. Parties in residential areas often generate complaints from neighbors who are disturbed by noise, improper parking, property damage, and littering. Such parties are of particular concern to police because they often include large numbers of underage drinkers and large quantities of alcohol. If the hosts charge an entry fee, they are essentially selling alcohol without a license, often to guests who are not of legal drinking age. House parties are popular among both high school and college students, as well as underage nonstudents. College students who live off campus are more likely to attend house parties than those who live on campus, and underage drinkers are more likely to gain access to alcohol at house parties than in bars or restaurants.<sup>34</sup>
- **Parties at outdoor venues such as beaches, parks, fields, or parking lots.** The remoteness of these locations may reduce the chances that residents will be bothered, but also usually means that partygoers will have to drive home after drinking. These parties, like those in private residences, rarely provide nonalcoholic beverages or food to mitigate alcohol's intoxicating effects.
- **College campuses.** Many colleges and universities have on-campus bars and pubs, and social and athletic events at which alcohol sales are permitted. Of particular note is the high rate of underage and binge drinking that occurs at fraternity houses. Over the years, fraternity membership has become closely associated with heavy drinking, as part of social events, pledging, and initiations.<sup>35</sup> Most students who join fraternities expect that alcohol will be central to their experience, despite



the fact that most are underage.<sup>36</sup> The high levels of drinking associated with fraternities are hazardous not only to members, but also to the large number of underage college or high school guests who regularly attend fraternity parties. Breaking up these parties and identifying the responsible adult can be particularly difficult for police.<sup>37</sup>

- **Bars and restaurants.** Older underage drinkers are more likely to drink in bars and restaurants.<sup>38</sup> Their close proximity to campus and advertised drink promotions make these venues an attractive choice for off-campus underage drinking. Many colleges have out-of-state students, requiring doormen or bartenders to judge the authenticity of driver's licenses with which they might not be familiar.

*David Corbett*



Excessive drinking is common at special events such as graduation, pre- or post-semester parties, and spring break.



- **Special events.** Many colleges and communities have special events that seem to encourage widespread, heavy drinking, such as homecoming, graduation, pre- or post-semester parties, Halloween, Mardi Gras, and athletic events. Partly due to the large number of people present, and the failure of event planners to create specific “over 21 only” areas, underage people may have little difficulty getting alcohol through third-party purchases and drinking it unnoticed. In some cases, supervising adults both expect and tolerate underage drinking.

Spring break is a college ritual associated with excessive drinking and other high-risk, extreme behavior. One study of students visiting a Florida beach community during spring break found that 75 percent of the males reported being intoxicated at least once per day, while 40 percent of females reported the same.<sup>39</sup> More than 50 percent of the men and more than 40 percent of the women reported drinking until they got sick or until they passed out at least once during the weeklong period. Given that people usually vomit when their body’s blood alcohol content (BAC) reaches approximately 0.16, and lose consciousness at a BAC of approximately 0.30, it is clear that many students on spring break are drinking at unsafe levels.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, high school and college students often play any of hundreds of drinking games.<sup>41</sup> These games encourage heavy drinking, and the resulting inability to follow game rules leads to even more drinking.





## Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of underage drinking. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy. You will likely find that effective responses to combat underage drinking will also result in reductions in alcohol-related crime such as drunken driving, assault, property damage, and noise violations.

§Using survey questions similar to those in the most widely used instruments, such as the College Alcohol Survey or the Monitoring the Future study, will allow you to compare your jurisdiction's trends with national trends.

## Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular underage drinking problem, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on. Because police may not know how much underage drinking occurs in a community, you should use multiple information sources, including police records, juvenile police officers or school resource officers, state and local alcohol beverage control (ABC) records, school faculty, parents and parent advocate groups, underage drinkers, underage *nondrinkers*, and observations of youth, alcohol outlets, and areas where underage people drink.

Further, it may be helpful for police to link with local colleges, universities, or researchers to design, test, and administer surveys for high school students, college students, and underage nonstudents.<sup>§</sup>



### *Offenders*

- What proportion of high school students drink alcohol?
- What proportion of local college/university students are underage? What percentage of them drink? How often? How much?
- What reasons do they give for drinking?
- What are underage drinkers' characteristics (e.g., age, occupation, gender, group affiliations)? What are underage *nondrinkers'* characteristics? Are there any differences in their characteristics that suggest opportunities for intervention?
- Which alcoholic beverages do high school students prefer? Which do college students prefer? Which do underage nonstudents prefer?
- Do underage people know what proportion of their peers drink, and how much?
- Do underage people believe they can obtain and drink alcohol without being denied or apprehended?
- What negative consequences of drinking do underage people fear (e.g., embarrassment from being refused alcohol in stores, hindrance to work or schooling, illness, injury, arrest)?

### *Incidents*

- In what proportion of crimes and police service calls is underage drinking a significant contributing factor? (Note: Many police report forms do not capture this information in a way that permits computerized tabulation, so you may need to read a sample of reports to estimate this figure.) What, specifically, is the nature of the crimes and service calls? How, specifically, do you believe underage drinking has contributed to the incident?
- How many alcohol-related deaths occur among those under 21 (e.g., car crash fatalities, drownings, suicides)?



- How many underage drinking-related incidents result in an arrest?
- How many citations, detentions, arrests, or other official interventions do police make for underage drinking? What proportion of all incidences of underage drinking do you estimate result in some official intervention?

§The Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation has produced a monograph on conducting alcohol purchase surveys. It is available on the Internet at [www.udetc.org/Publications.htm](http://www.udetc.org/Publications.htm).

### *Environment*

- What types of alcohol advertising are present in the community? Newspaper ads? Billboards? Radio commercials? Do major alcohol manufacturers or distributors sponsor any community events or athletic events? How much of this advertising and promotion do you believe particularly targets underage people?
- Which local retailers, bars, and restaurants advertise large-volume price discounts, drink specials, or other promotions? Where are these advertisements placed?
- What types of alcohol-free opportunities to socialize are available to high school students? To 18- to 20-year-olds? How are the events publicized? How many people attend? Which events are most popular? What reasons do young people give for not going?

### *Alcohol Sources*<sup>§</sup>

- Do underage youth obtain alcohol through parents, older siblings, or other relatives?
- Do underage youth ask strangers to buy alcohol for them? Where do these transactions occur? Is a fee provided? What are the characteristics of the strangers who agree to make the purchase? Of those who refuse?
- Which fraternity and sorority houses and private residences have reputations as “party houses?”



- Which licensed establishments have a reputation for not checking ID, or for accepting fake IDs? Are individual clerks, door staff, or managers part of the problem?
- Are there relationships between the staff and the customers (e.g., they know each other from campus) that make service denial difficult?
- Is it more likely for underage people to obtain alcohol because they showed a fake ID, or because the vendor did not ask for ID?
- How many fake ID cards get confiscated? Who confiscates them (e.g., police, licensed- establishment employees, school officials)? How have the IDs been altered or falsified? Where and how do the drinkers obtain them?

### *Times/Locations*

- How often do underage drinkers drink? How much do they drink?
- When do underage drinkers typically drink (e.g., time of day, day of week)?
- Where does underage drinking occur (e.g., private parties, licensed establishments, parks, remote areas)?
- How many underage parties at private residences come to police attention? How do the police find out about them?
- How many youth attend the parties? How do they learn about them? Do they have to pay a fee to get in? Are adults of legal age responsible for the parties?
- Are particular neighborhoods or residences known for underage parties? Are there outdoor venues (e.g., parks, beaches, fields) popular among underage drinkers?
- What type of alcohol is typically served at parties? Is food served? Are nonalcoholic beverages available?
- What are local college and university policies regarding alcohol sales and consumption on campus? How involved are the Greek organizations in the drinking environment? What are their policies and practices regarding the availability of alcohol at their parties?



- How many retail outlets and bars are there in the community? Do certain areas have high concentrations of retail outlets or bars?

### *Special Events*

- At which community events does alcohol play a role in advertising or in event participation? Athletic events? What deterrents to underage drinking are in place at these events? How do underage drinkers circumvent these controls to get access?
- Is your community a popular spring break destination? What are the typical spring break activities for students there? What types of problems do you encounter during that time?
- Do underage drinkers participate in drinking games? If so, which games are popular? What types of problems occur at parties or events where people play drinking games?

### *Current Responses*

- What is your jurisdiction currently doing to address underage drinking? Is there evidence that any activities are particularly effective? What is *not* working, and why?
- Which agencies are involved with this issue? Are there other agencies, organizations, groups, or individuals who need to play a role?
- What legal sanctions are there for underage drinking? What sanctions are actually imposed?
- Are there other administrative sanctions that apply to certain groups of underage drinkers (e.g., suspensions or demerits for students)? What sanctions are typically applied?
- Are there any informal social sanctions applied to certain groups of underage drinkers (e.g., being grounded by parents, being benched by athletic coaches, being fired by employers)?



## Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of underage drinking *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. All measures should be taken in both the target area and the surrounding area. (For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*.)

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to underage drinking:

- Reductions in the proportion of underage high school and college students who report drinking
- Reductions in the number of citations given to minors for possession, underage purchase, etc. (assuming a constant enforcement level)
- Reductions in the number of retailers cited for selling alcohol to minors (assuming a constant enforcement level)
- Reductions in the number of citations given for third-party alcohol purchases (assuming a constant enforcement level)
- Reductions in the number of underage drinking parties requiring police response
- Reductions in the number of complaints received about underage drinking parties
- Reductions in the number of students who report having to tolerate secondhand effects of their peers' drinking;
- Reductions in alcohol-related crime statistics (e.g., assault, property damage, sexual assault)
- Reductions in the number of alcohol-related deaths (e.g., suicides, traffic fatalities).



## **Responses to the Problem of Underage Drinking**

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation for addressing your particular underage drinking problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: give careful consideration to who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.

### **General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy**

- 1. Reducing the community's overall alcohol consumption.**

Any efforts to reduce a community's overall drinking have the potential to reduce underage drinking as well. Changing the norms about alcohol's role in the community can affect young people as well as those legal to drink. Specific responses could include discouraging price discounts on alcohol, restricting the hours or days retailers can sell alcohol, or limiting the number of community alcohol outlets.



2. **Creating community coalitions.** Many groups have a vested interest in the problem of underage drinking. However, conflicting personal, political, and business interests can make cooperative community efforts difficult to implement and even harder to sustain.<sup>42</sup> The most successful efforts to combat underage drinking have included a broad range of stakeholders who can lend their specific expertise to the issue, and whose involvement can help to reduce any resistance to the effort. Potential partners include the following:

  - State, local, and campus police agencies
  - County prosecutor's and city attorney's offices
  - State and local elected officials
  - Local high schools, colleges, and universities
  - Parent organizations such as the Parent-Teacher Association and Mothers Against Drunk Driving
  - Student organizations such as the student council athletics associations, Students Against Drunk Driving, and Interfraternity Council
  - Community recreation programs and athletic programs
  - Community and neighborhood programs such as Crime Watch and Neighborhood Watch
  - Alcohol licensing bureaus and ABC boards
  - Local bars and restaurants, and alcohol wholesalers and distributors
  - Local retailers and distribution centers
  - Media advocacy groups.
3. **Using a multifaceted, comprehensive approach.** A multifaceted, comprehensive approach is more effective than one that focuses on only one or two aspects of underage drinking. For example, responses targeting only the commercial availability of alcohol to minors could displace the problem to residential neighborhoods, in the form of house parties. A comprehensive approach should address the motivations for





underage drinking, the specific harms associated with underage drinking (e.g., drunken driving), the commercial *and* social availability of alcohol, the use of fake IDs, and the community's norms regarding alcohol. It is vital to look broadly at the environment that supports the problem behavior.<sup>§</sup> Programs targeting the college environments in which drinking occurs have been shown to reduce the level of students' alcohol consumption, as well as the problems experienced by drinkers and those around them.<sup>43</sup>

§See DeJong and Langford (2002) for a useful table of strategies that illustrate the importance of approaching the problem from various levels and focusing on the environment that sustains the behavior.

§§You can find a description of each state's statutes at [www.nllea.org/reports/ABCEnforcementLegalResearch.pdf](http://www.nllea.org/reports/ABCEnforcementLegalResearch.pdf).

4. **Understanding your state's laws regarding underage drinking.** All U.S. states have laws governing minors' purchase and possession of alcohol. However, the specifics of the laws vary widely, and their usefulness in constructing responses can be limited by unusual wording or loopholes.<sup>44</sup> When considering responses that alter penalties or apply new sections of law to the problem, it is vitally important to consult with your jurisdiction's prosecutor to ensure the law's interpretation supports your intentions.<sup>§§</sup>
5. **Avoiding overwhelming the court system.** Stepping up enforcement efforts nearly always results in an increase in court cases. If the system is not prepared to handle the increase, and offenders are not quickly sanctioned, the response's effectiveness may be undermined. For this reason alone, it is often worthwhile to develop responses that do not rely on the application of criminal penalties. Some jurisdictions have anticipated this issue and have included court representatives in the project-planning phase, to get their cooperation in handling the increased number of cases,<sup>45</sup> or have enlisted them as partners to create alternative sanctions for offenders, such as community service-based diversion programs.<sup>46</sup>



## Specific Responses to Underage Drinking

### *Responses That Target the Motivation to Drink*

- 6. Implementing a “social norms” program.** Some interventions use a harm-reduction approach. In other words, they attempt to reduce how much or how often young people drink, rather than try to prevent underage drinking altogether, which some see as unrealistic, particularly among college students.



Many universities have developed a wide variety of visual aids to correct students' misperceptions of typical drinking behavior among their peers.

Given that many youth drink because they think “everyone else is doing it,” providing accurate information on the typical amount of alcohol consumed and the proportion of peers who drink heavily (both of which are lower than most young people estimate) may reduce overall consumption levels among college students.<sup>47</sup> Essential steps include identifying students' primary source of information (e.g., the campus newspaper), placing notices that provide accurate statistics regarding alcohol use, and providing students with incentives



to process and retain the information. Social norms researchers recommend keeping the message simple, straightforward, and consistent, and stressing the norm of moderation.<sup>48</sup> Anticipate some opposition to an approach that could be perceived as condoning some level of underage drinking.<sup>§</sup>

§While there is research to substantiate the effectiveness of social norms marketing programs, other studies cast doubt on their effectiveness. For example, Wechsler et al (2003), compared student drinking patterns at colleges that employed social-norms marketing programs and those that did not. Over a three year period, no decreases in various measures of alcohol use were evident at schools with social norms marketing programs. In fact, increases in monthly alcohol use and in total volume consumed were observed at some schools.

7. **Raising underage drinkers' awareness of their behavior's impact on other people.** Informing underage drinkers that their drinking adversely affects their peers, and that their peers are no longer willing to tolerate it, can encourage young people to reduce their alcohol use.<sup>49</sup>

*Hobart & William Smith College's Alcohol Education Project, see [academic.hws.edu/alcohol/posters/posters](http://academic.hws.edu/alcohol/posters/posters)*



Posters and flyers raise awareness of the second-hand effects of drinking.



§See Walters (2000) for sample feedback forms.

§§Several companies publish reference books of each state's ID cards. For example, see [www.idcheckingguide.com](http://www.idcheckingguide.com).

These campaigns should take care not to reinforce an institution's reputation as a "party school" or encourage the ostracism of nondrinkers.<sup>50</sup> They should direct those interested to further resources and information.

8. **Providing treatment or feedback.** Cognitive-behavioral approaches and skills-based training have proved effective strategies in reducing high-risk drinking among young people.<sup>51</sup> These interventions require drinkers to monitor their alcohol use and any alcohol-related problems. They also teach important skills such as drink refusal and drink pacing to reduce the harms associated with underage drinking. In addition, motivational techniques<sup>§</sup> that provide nonjudgmental feedback to young people based on their own assessment of their drinking patterns have had some success in reducing drinking and its negative consequences.<sup>52</sup>

### *Responses That Target Commercial Access to Alcohol*

9. **Improving the ability to detect fake IDs.** Using fake IDs to obtain alcohol from retailers or at bars and restaurants is widespread, in part because of the relative ease in altering, forging, or counterfeiting these documents. In addition, underage drinkers often present merchants, bartenders, and door staff with out-of-state IDs with which they are not familiar, making it difficult to detect minor alterations. ID guides can help in detecting the more egregious falsifications.<sup>§§</sup> Training programs are also available to help in identifying more subtle forms of falsification, such as picture replacement, date adjustments, computer-generated duplicates, and mismatches between the person's appearance and the ID photograph.<sup>53</sup>



Many states have changed their driver's licenses and ID cards to make them more tamper-resistant. For example, some states use a profile photograph of minors to clearly indicate that they are under 21. Others boldly print "Under 21 Until..." on the face of ID cards. Holograms or indicators that can be seen only under an ultraviolet light can also deter counterfeiting. Using scanners to read barcodes and magnetic strips can also help in detecting altered ID cards.<sup>54</sup> While this response must be enacted at the state level, it can provide a powerful tool for reducing fake-ID use.

When citing someone for using a fake ID, you should ask about the source of the document so that you can tailor your responses to unique problems or emerging trends. For example, one jurisdiction confiscated a number of fake IDs procured through the Internet. By copyrighting the state's driver's license, the jurisdiction could use copyright-violation laws to close down counterfeiting Internet sites.<sup>55</sup>

*David Corbett*



ID guides can help doormen to identify documents that have been falsified.



**10. Implementing “Responsible Beverage Service and Sales Training” programs.** The primary lines of defense against commercial access to alcohol by underage youth are the sales clerks, waiters and waitresses, and bartenders who directly interact with them. Business owners and managers should set clear policies for their employees regarding checking ID and denying service to underage customers. Without this support, changes in server or seller behavior are unlikely.

Many states’ ABC boards provide free responsible-beverage-service-and-sales training to licensed establishments. Some states require such training for licensing, and others provide specific incentives for businesses that participate voluntarily. These programs inform participants about state and local ordinances concerning alcohol sales to minors, and about penalties for breaking the law. Further, they help owners and managers to develop establishment-level policies and practices to help employees carry out their legal obligations. Essential elements of effective service and sales policies include:<sup>56</sup>

- Establishing 21 as the minimum age for everyone who serves or sells alcohol
- Ensuring that staff know their legal responsibilities regarding underage sales
- Ensuring that staff know the establishment’s policies and the consequences for violating them
- Requiring ID from all customers who appear to be under 30
- Developing specific guidelines and providing training on valid forms of ID
- Monitoring staff compliance and enforcing consequences for violations.



Good training programs offer skill-development exercises, such as:<sup>57</sup>

- How to identify a fake ID, how to confiscate it, and what to do with it once confiscated
- How to determine whether an adult is buying alcohol for someone underage, and how to refuse service
- How to resist pressure to serve or sell alcohol to an underage customer
- How to refuse service without creating a tense situation.

Businesses should inform customers about their participation in such programs, both to encourage community support for responsible business practices and to deter underage youth from trying to buy alcohol or gain entry.

- 11. Enforcing minimum-age purchase laws.** The primary means to enforce minimum-age purchase laws is to conduct compliance checks of businesses that sell alcohol for use either on or off premises. Compliance checks use underage volunteers who try to gain entry and alcohol service at bars or restaurants, or buy alcohol at stores. The volunteer is directed to be truthful about his or her age, if asked, and to present legitimate ID. If the volunteer is able to buy alcohol, the server and manager are cited for violating the minimum-age purchase law. In some jurisdictions, if a clerk or bartender appropriately denies service to an underage volunteer, the alcohol board notifies the business owner and encourages the owner to congratulate and reward the employee for obeying the law.<sup>58</sup>



§See Alcohol Epidemiology Program (2000) and Willingham (n.d.) for two excellent guides on designing compliance investigations.

There are a number of important considerations and decisions to be made when designing a compliance investigation:<sup>§</sup>

- Selecting underage volunteers who clearly *look* underage, and whose diverse characteristics may help to avoid bias or other factors that may influence sales rates
- Training volunteers on how to make a purchase: how to act, what to say, and how to respond to questions
- Selecting location, time of day, and frequency of operations
- Choosing the type and amount of alcohol to buy
- Addressing a variety of operational issues, such as deploying officers, issuing citations, recording or observing transactions, keeping records, and working with the media.

Given that the overall goal is to reduce alcohol sales to minors, and *not* to issue a high volume of citations, it is important to give retailers, bars, and restaurants notice that random and ongoing compliance checks will be conducted.<sup>59</sup> Such notice, and prior consultation with local prosecutors, can also help to prevent entrapment claims.

Some jurisdictions supplement compliance investigations with “Cops-in-Shops” operations that station a police officer in an establishment, as either a customer or an employee, to apprehend underage people trying to buy alcohol. Establishments cooperating in these operations post a sign in the window notifying customers that a police officer may pose as an employee, and advising them of the penalties for underage purchases. While this enforcement strategy has not been rigorously evaluated, case studies suggest that “Cops-in-Shops” programs can effectively supplement compliance checks, although they should not substitute for them.<sup>60</sup> One of the main benefits of these operations is on-the-job training on identifying fake IDs and detecting typical physical and behavioral characteristics of minors—and of adults buying alcohol for them.<sup>61</sup>





- 12. Conducting undercover “shoulder tap” operations.** One of the main ways that young people obtain alcohol from commercial sources is to ask strangers to buy it for them. In “shoulder tap” operations, an undercover operative approaches an adult outside a store and asks the adult to buy him or her alcohol. If the adult agrees and does so, he or she is cited for furnishing alcohol to someone underage. As with all undercover operations, decisions about the characteristics of the volunteers used, the scripts delivered, the types of establishments and potential buyers targeted, the time of day, and other concerns are paramount to the effectiveness of the response. Very few of these operations have been evaluated, but case studies suggest that highly publicized operations that generate a large number of citations are likely to have a deterrent effect and reduce the amount of alcohol minors obtain through third parties.<sup>62</sup>
- 13. Checking ID at bars and nightclubs.** In this response, either plainclothes or uniformed officers enter an “on-premise” establishment and check the IDs of everyone drinking alcohol. They cite those with no or fraudulent ID, and the establishment may face administrative consequences. These ID checks encourage doormen and bartenders to be diligent in their efforts to verify customer age, and they show customers that the police support the establishment’s policies and procedures.



**14. Applying graduated sanctions to retailers that break the law.** There are three types of penalties imposed in response to violations of minimum-age purchase laws:<sup>63</sup>

- *Administrative:* These penalties involve restrictions, suspensions, or revocations of business licenses if retailers do not follow state and local standards of conduct.
- *Criminal:* These penalties apply to the person who sells alcohol to a minor. They may include fines, probation, or imprisonment, and they may be noted on a criminal record.
- *Civil:* These penalties are commonly called “dramshop liability,” and refer to lawsuits for monetary damages for any harm caused by minors served alcohol by retailers.

Penalties are most effective when believed to be both swift and certain. The likelihood of sanctions is more important than the severity of sanctions in encouraging compliance.<sup>64</sup> Given the complexity and often excessive severity of criminal charges, most states have found that administrative penalties are the most effective. Further, administrative penalties hold the establishment’s owner responsible and significantly affect profitability, which encourages owners to ensure that all employees follow the law. The threat of civil liability has been shown to increase the consistency with which ID is checked, and to be related to decreases in negative alcohol-related consequences.<sup>65</sup> One incentive for retailers to comply with the various provisions of responsible-beverage-service-and-sales programs is to shield them from dramshop liability if they can demonstrate that they followed all applicable policies and practices.



### *Responses That Target Social Access to Alcohol*

- 15. Training adults about “social host liability.”** Social host liability refers to the imposition of civil penalties against adults who provide alcohol to minors for injuries caused by those minors. Approximately 30 states have some form of social-host-liability law,<sup>66</sup> but education and awareness programs must be in place to make them effective.<sup>67</sup> At a minimum, education efforts should stress that it is unacceptable for adults to furnish minors with alcohol, and should increase awareness of relevant laws, penalties, and enforcement initiatives. This type of training has proved particularly effective with Greek organizations on college campuses, some of which have radically altered their practices regarding large house parties.
- 16. Requiring keg registration.** Police have noted that it is often difficult to identify the adult responsible for providing alcohol to minors at large house parties, particularly keg parties on college campuses. Keg registration links buyer information to the keg itself, through tags, stickers, or ID numbers stenciled on the keg. At the retail outlet, the buyer must provide ID and contact information, and may also be required to sign a statement indicating awareness that it is illegal to furnish alcohol to minors. When police seize a keg of beer at a party where underage drinking is occurring, the person responsible for furnishing the alcohol can be easily identified through the retailer. This response is relatively low-cost. However, a number of jurisdictions have noted that retailers can exploit voluntary keg registration by advertising their refusal to participate (e.g., “We don’t use keg tracking”).<sup>68</sup> Thus, it may be sensible to make keg registration mandatory.





**Georgia Department of Revenue**  
**Alcohol and Tobacco Division**

Fill in blanks – Retain the original (licensee)

**KEG REGISTRATION IDENTIFICATION FORM – IDENTIFICATION # \_\_\_\_\_**

Name of Purchaser (Print) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Type of ID shown \_\_\_\_\_ ID# \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location where keg will be consumed \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

I am at least 21 years of age and understand that alcoholic beverages purchased under this receipt can only be consumed at the address and on the dates listed above, that the purchasing of alcoholic beverages for a person under 21 years of age and furnishing alcoholic beverages to a person under 21 years of age are violations of O.C.G.A. 3-3-23 and that such violations may result in civil liability or criminal prosecution, or both. I further acknowledge that removal or obliteration of the keg registration label is a violation of O.C.G.A. 3-5-5 and that such violations may result in criminal prosecution as set forth in O.C.G.A. 3-3-9, and will result in the container deposit made at the time of purchase, not being returned.

Signature of Purchaser \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

A total of \_\_\_\_\_ keg(s) of malt beverage was/were sold to the above individual  
 in the following size(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
 by: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of Seller)  
 On: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date of Sale)

Trade name of business \_\_\_\_\_  
 State License number \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date Returned \_\_\_\_\_ The Registration label was \_\_\_\_\_ was not \_\_\_\_\_ intact.

Keg registration fee: \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR THE PURCHASE OF MORE THAN ONE KEG, RECORD IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS BELOW**

KEG ID NUMBER	KEG ID NUMBER	KEG ID NUMBER	KEG ID NUMBER

Many states use keg registration to link information about those who purchase a keg to the keg itself. Buyers are required to complete a form at the time of purchase. The keg is marked with a permanent sticker or tag.

### *Responses That Target Locations Where Drinking Occurs*

**17. Developing house party guidelines, registration forms, and pre-party walk-through procedures.** Offering guidance on how to host a safe party at which minors cannot access alcohol can reduce underage drinking and the number of complaints received from neighbors bothered by noise, traffic, and other



party by-products. A number of police departments and college student organizations have developed guidelines for safe parties. These guidelines offer pre-party preparation and hosting tips, such as the following:<sup>69</sup>

- Inform neighbors about the party and ask them to contact the host first if they have any concerns or problems, rather than automatically calling the police.
- Take frequent walks around the outside of the house and property to assess noise levels.
- Do not permit underage guests to drink.
- Ensure that people who have been drinking do not drive.
- If the police do show up, turn off the music, stop the party, and talk calmly with the officers.

Other jurisdictions use voluntary party registration forms and pre-party site visits by police to offer prevention tips to parents or property owners. Guides have been developed to help high school students' parents in planning parties at their homes. Typical guidelines include the following:<sup>70</sup>

- Limit the number of people invited, and the number of people allowed on the property.
- Have sufficient chaperones to monitor the property and the guests for any problems.
- Be prepared to call an underage guest's parents if he or she appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Set a beginning and ending time for the party.

It is important to remind party hosts that pre-party police advice is not foolproof, and that controlling the party and access to alcohol is their responsibility.



§The San Diego Police Department uses its College Area Party Plan to identify locations that have been the subject of repeated violations and complaints. Once a property has been identified as a CAPP property, a zero tolerance policy is enacted for all future complaints: no warnings are given, and proactive arrests are made. The Silver Gate Group (2001).

- 18. Setting up hotlines to gather information.** Hotlines for students, teachers, or parents concerned about underage drinking can be a valuable information source. People use a hotline to report a party location either before or during the event. Patrol officers then drive by the location to identify any problems. Providing an easy-to-remember phone number, ensuring caller anonymity, and staffing the hotline with nonpolice personnel increase the likelihood people will call.

*Texas Alcohol Beverage Commission  
[www.tabc.state.tx.us/enforce/hotline.htm](http://www.tabc.state.tx.us/enforce/hotline.htm)*



Well-publicized hotlines can be a valuable source of information about party locations.

- 19. Deploying party patrols.** Teams of police officers dedicated to identifying and dispersing parties where underage drinking is occurring not only serve as a deterrent to such events, but also can reduce the number of youth who drive after drinking. Police identify party locations through hotline reports, complaints received from neighbors, keg registrations, or routine patrol. § Once police establish probable cause and secure the perimeter



of the location, they enter it;<sup>§</sup> contact the host; identify those age 21 and over and those under 21 who have not been drinking, and release them; and process those under 21 who have been drinking. They also cite the adult(s) responsible for furnishing the alcohol. Arranging safe transportation for those who have been drinking is vitally important. There are a number of detailed implementation guides available.<sup>§§</sup>

<sup>§</sup>You should consult legal counsel if you are uncertain about police authority in your jurisdiction to enter house parties without a warrant.

<sup>§§</sup>See Morrison and Didone (2000) and Casady (2002), accessible at [www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/police/pdf/nuparty.pdf](http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/police/pdf/nuparty.pdf).

**20. Imposing fines for *each* underage person drinking at a party.**

Large monetary penalties for providing alcohol to minors can be an effective deterrent to groups and organizations that regularly host parties where underage drinking occurs (e.g., fraternities and sororities). Issuing a summons to the responsible adult for each underage guest found drinking at a party can be financially devastating. One jurisdiction issued 70 summonses at one event, resulting in a fine of over \$20,000 to the host.<sup>71</sup> The financial liability from large parties where alcohol distribution is not controlled has caused a number of national Greek organizations to require that their properties and social functions be alcohol-free.<sup>72</sup> When fine amounts are modest, party hosts may conclude that they are a small cost compared with the revenue they get from charging admission.

**21. Using landlord-tenant ordinances and nuisance abatement procedures.** When police receive numerous complaints about parties from neighbors, and respond to a location multiple times and find underage drinking, they may have additional leverage through landlord-tenant ordinances and nuisance abatement procedures.<sup>73</sup> If the party host rents the property, the landlord can be brought in to help resolve the problem. Upon the first citation for providing alcohol to minors, the landlord is issued a warning. Subsequent citations lead to requirements for corrective action plans, and ultimately, eviction if the problem continues. Similarly, some jurisdictions have used nuisance abatement procedures to combat problems often associated with house parties, such as illegal alcohol sales, excessive noise, and property damage.<sup>74</sup> It is vitally important to document all contacts with tenants and owners to establish a record of noncompliance.



§See Fisher (1999) and National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2002) for detailed response guides for college campuses.

- 22. Restricting alcohol use at popular outdoor venues and community events.** Restricting drinking in public places can reduce excessive drinking and sales to minors.<sup>75</sup> One way to control the flow of alcohol at public venues is to issue conditional-use permits that set standards for how and when alcohol can be sold, served, or consumed. These permits can restrict drinking to certain “21 and over” areas, restrict the hours of sale, and limit advertising.
- 23. Sponsoring alcohol-free events.** High school and college students often complain that “there’s nothing to do” in their communities, and often have few opportunities to socialize outside of school. This may increase drinking’s appeal. Coalition- or school-sponsored alcohol-free events can increase the array of social alternatives for youth and can substitute for events and traditions centered on excessive drinking (e.g., after-prom parties, tailgating before athletic events, spring break).<sup>76</sup> The events schedule should be focused on the most problematic times of the day, days of the week, and locations.<sup>77</sup> For example, late-night weekend activities such as movies or karaoke can be planned for residence halls where underage drinking has been a persistent problem.
- 24. Developing campus policies to deter underage drinking.** Given that college campuses are popular settings for underage drinking, it is vital that school-specific strategies be enacted in jurisdictions that include colleges and universities. These could include clarifying campus alcohol policies, creating substance-free housing and dormitories, adjusting class and exam schedules to deter Thursday-night drinking, and using campus disciplinary procedures to emphasize the school’s intolerance for alcohol violations.<sup>78, §</sup>





## *Responses That Focus on the Consequences of Underage Drinking*

**25. Applying administrative sanctions rather than criminal penalties.** Criminal penalties are meant to serve as a deterrent. However, severe criminal penalties for underage drinking-related offenses (e.g., possession, attempted purchase, use of fake ID) are seldom enforced and have not proved a big deterrent.<sup>79</sup> In part, the lack of widespread, consistent enforcement is due to the burden on prosecutor and court resources, and a reluctance to enforce stiff penalties for what is perceived as a minor offense. Criminal sanctions are often neither swift nor certain, which undermines their deterrent effect. In contrast, less severe penalties (e.g., fines, community service) are more likely to be enforced and may be a greater deterrent.<sup>80</sup>

§For example, Virginia's ABC board created a pamphlet, available at [www.abc.virginia.gov/facts/fakeid.html](http://www.abc.virginia.gov/facts/fakeid.html).

Suspension of a minor's driver's license in response to an alcohol violation—whether or not the offense involved a vehicle—is the penalty for breaking use/lose laws. For youths not yet licensed to drive, use/lose laws generally delay the issuance of a driver's license for a specified amount of time. These laws have been linked to a reduction in vehicle-related alcohol problems,<sup>81</sup> but raise constitutional concerns.<sup>82</sup> Use/lose laws have been extended to cover the use of a fake ID. Many states have recently increased the penalties for using a fake ID, and have publicized these changes to ensure that young people are aware of the consequences for doing so.<sup>§</sup> Keep in mind that extending driver's licensing sanctions to nondriving offenses almost certainly will increase offenses such as driving with a suspended or revoked license and eluding a police officer.



**26. Applying informal social control.** While there have been no evaluations of informal social control's impact on underage drinking, we know that young people are often more powerfully influenced by teachers, coaches, mentors, peers, and parents than they are by the threat of formal sanctions. Enlisting the help of responsible adults who have relationships with young people not only can prevent expensive criminal justice sanctions that often take some time to be imposed, but also sends a powerful message about the community's intolerance for underage drinking. For example, when police cite high school or college athletes for underage drinking, notifying their coaches of the infractions can lead to creative consequences that hold the offenders accountable but do not saddle them with a criminal record. Similarly, parents and schools revoke privileges (e.g., driving, participating in social events) or impose disciplinary sanctions in response to citations for underage drinking. Military commanders may discipline underage soldiers who come into contact with police. Police may find opportunities to support these forms of informal social control.

### **Responses With Limited Effectiveness**

**27. Using school-based education, awareness, or values-clarification programs.** Student orientation, alcohol awareness weeks, and curriculum infusion are typical interventions found on high school and college campuses. The assumption guiding these efforts is that people make wiser choices if they know the facts about alcohol. Although this may be true, information alone is usually insufficient to change behavior.<sup>83</sup> Evaluations of these stand-alone programs have found no effect on alcohol use or alcohol-related consequences.<sup>84</sup>



**28. Launching consequence-focused information campaigns.**

Focusing solely on the negative consequences of underage drinking is unlikely to affect young people's alcohol use.<sup>85</sup>

Not only is drinking likely to be entrenched in community and peer group norms, but also young people tend to be risk-takers and to deny their vulnerability to both short- and long-term consequences. Most importantly, consequence-focused campaigns rarely address the motivations for underage drinking—nor do they offer realistic or practical alternatives.





## Appendix A: Summary of Responses to Underage Drinking

The table below summarizes the responses to underage drinking, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<b>General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy</b>					
1.	19	Reducing the community's overall alcohol consumption	Changes community norms about drinking	...multiple responses are used simultaneously	May not address the specific reasons for, locations of, and problems associated with underage drinking
2.	20	Creating community coalitions	Enlists multiple stakeholders with specific areas of expertise; reduces resistance; establishes joint ownership of the problem	...resistant stakeholders are also included	Requires a high level of project management to sustain interest over time
3.	20	Using a multifaceted, comprehensive approach	Addresses many of the known risk factors; prevents displacement	...responses are implemented as designed and are properly sequenced	Difficult to isolate a specific intervention's effect; requires coordination; a large number of options can be overwhelming



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
4.	21	Understanding your state's laws regarding underage drinking	Ensures that responses are appropriately targeted and can withstand scrutiny in court	...police review the laws in consultation with the local prosecutor	Frequently amended and updated, so a regular review is required
5	21	Avoiding overwhelming the court system	Increases the likelihood of a quick response	...meaningful alternative sanctions are in place	Effect depends on the impact of criminal versus noncriminal sanctions among the target group

**Specific Responses to Underage Drinking**

*Responses that Target the Motivation to Drink*

6.	22	Implementing a "social norms" program	Corrects misperceptions about the proportion of peers who drink; uses adolescents' desire to conform to reduce drinkin	...the message is simple, memorable, truthful, and reinforced	Gives the message that some underage drinking is acceptable; could encourage those who drink less than the norm to increase their consumption in order to fit in
7.	23	Raising underage drinkers' awareness of their behavior's impact on other people	Uses peer pressure to encourage underage drinkers to control their behavior	...victimized students are empowered, specific statistics that show widespread impact are used, and additional information resources are provided	Risk of reinforcing a "party school" image; risk that nondrinkers will be ostracized if they are not sufficiently empowered
8.	24	Providing treatment or feedback	Provides personalized feedback on the level of risk underage drinkers face; provides them with skills to help break their drinking habits	...it is not seen as punishment, is nonjudgmental, and provides alternative ways of behaving	Those who most need intervention may be the ones who don't show up for or drop out of treatment



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Responses That Target Commercial Access to Alcohol</i>					
9.	24	Improving the ability to detect fake IDs	Eliminates a tool commonly used to obtain alcohol	...servers/sellers are trained, have good reference materials and good lighting, and are supported by management	Long-term effect is limited unless the original source of the IDs is addressed
10.	26	Implementing "Responsible Beverage Service and Sales Training" programs	Restricts access to sources of alcohol; provides skills and incentives for servers/sellers to comply with the law	...laws are enforced, the training is mandatory, and following procedures protects businesses from dramshop liability	If not mandatory, establishments may lose business to places that do not comply; requires police and management enforcement to be taken seriously
11.	27	Enforcing minimum-age purchase laws	Reinforces establishment-level procedures to refuse service to those under 21	...compliance checks are random, ongoing, and conducted on a large number of retail outlets; and administrative penalties apply to both the server/seller and the manager/owner... the undercover	Can be expensive in jurisdictions with large numbers of outlets
12.	29	Checking ID at bars and nightclubs	Conducting undercover "shoulder tap" operations	Fear of sanctions deters adults from buying alcohol for minors	Can be complicated and expensive; if not properly designed, it can be vulnerable to entrapment claims
13.	29	Checking ID at bars and nightclubs	Reinforces establishment-level procedures to refuse service to those under 21	...checks are random and ongoing, fake IDs are seized, and meaningful sanctions are applied to both the minor and the establishment	Need to target a wide range of establishments to be seen as fair
14.	30	Applying graduated sanctions to retailers that break the law	Holds retailers accountable, with increasingly punitive sanctions for subsequent infractions; affects profitability	...sanctions are administratively focused, and penalties are swift and certain	Criminal penalties can be complex and time-consuming; need to target a wide range of establishments to be seen as fair



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Responses That Target Social Access to Alcohol</i>					
15	31	Training adults about “social host liability	Fear of sanctions deters adults from buying alcohol for minors	...laws are accompanied by widespread education and awareness efforts, and enforcement is consistent	Not likely to be effective without enforcement
16.	31	Requiring keg registration	Allows police to identify the retailer that furnished alcohol to minors	...it is mandatory, and a fine is imposed for tampering with a tag or sticker on a keg	If registration is not mandatory, establishments that voluntarily comply may lose business to those that don't
<i>Responses That Target Locations Where Drinking Occurs</i>					
17.	32	Developing house party guidelines, registration forms, and pre-party walk-through procedures	Provides useful advice about controlling house parties	...a responsible adult who is motivated to obey the law is in charge of the party	Is voluntary; despite good intentions, the party may still get out of control and require police intervention
18	34	Setting up hotlines to gather information	Helps police to identify potentially problematic party locations	...the hotline is staffed by nonpolice personnel, and the number is well-publicized and easy to remember	Not all information may be accurate or useful; not all parties will be discovered this way
19.	34	Deploying party patrols	Fear of sanctions deters hosts from having parties; parties where underage drinking occurs are dispersed	...patrols are consistent, routine, and highly publicized; and dispersal is safe and orderly	Can be cost-prohibitive and time-consuming; diverts officers from other duties
20.	35	Imposing fines for each underage person drinking at a party	Increases financial consequences of hosting a party where underage guests are drinking	...fines are imposed after the initiative has been publicized and warnings have been issued, and there is significant public support	May be viewed as excessively punitive





Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
21.	35	Using landlord-tenant ordinances and nuisance abatement procedures	Uses civil remedies to target properties with a history of violations	...multiple agencies are involved, and all interactions and violations have been documented	Likely to require a significant time investment
22.	36	Restricting alcohol use at popular outdoor venues and community events	Adjusts community norms regarding drinking; makes it harder for underage drinkers to obtain alcohol	...limitations are strictly enforced for all drinkers	Requires significant manpower to enforce at big community events
23.	36	Sponsoring alcohol-free events	Decreases reliance on alcohol-centered events as a means of socializing	...the events are scheduled for the times, days, and locations that have historically been the most problematic, and the events are highly publicized	Needs to target those who would otherwise be drinking to have an impact on the overall underage drinking problem
24	36	Developing campus policies to deter underage drinking	Holds students accountable, using school-based disciplinary procedures	...the policies send a consistent message about alcohol's role on campus, problem drinking at Greek organizations is targeted, and students are involved in policy development	Requires support from diverse groups of stakeholders; likely to encounter some opposition
<i>Responses That Focus on the Consequences for Underage Drinking</i>					
25	37	Applying administrative sanctions rather than criminal penalties	Holds offenders accountable with sanctions that can be quickly applied	...the alternative sanctions are meaningful, and the community supports alternative sentencing	May require the creation of new programs and sanctions, or the expansion of existing ones
26.	38	Applying informal social control	Enlists people with important relationships with youths to encourage them to change their behavior	...the behavior is sanctioned appropriately, and the youths are concerned about others' opinions	Requires knowledge of the significant others in minors' lives; requires cooperation from significant others



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Responses With Limited Effectiveness</i>					
27.	38	Using school-based education, awareness, or values-clarification programs	Assumes that knowing the facts leads to better choices		Information alone is usually insufficient to produce a change in behavior
28.	39	Launching consequence-focused information campaigns	Assumes that knowing about the negative consequences will deter dangerous or illegal behavior		Information often stands in stark contrast to young people's experience and thus has little credibility; young people tend to deny their own vulnerability; it does not address the motivations for drinking



## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> Wagenaar (1993).
- <sup>3</sup> Wechsler (2001).
- <sup>4</sup> Keeling (2002).
- <sup>5</sup> Bonnie and O'Connell (2003).
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- <sup>26</sup> Wagenaar et al. (1996).
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- <sup>31</sup> Myers and Willingham (2001).
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- <sup>39</sup> Smeaton and Josalm (1998).
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- <sup>41</sup> Borsari, Bergen-Cico, and Carey (2003).
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- <sup>45</sup> Wichita Police Department (1999).
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- <sup>48</sup> Haines (1996).
- <sup>49</sup> DeJong (2002).
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- <sup>52</sup> Larimer and Cronce (2002).
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<sup>79</sup> Bonnie and O'Connell (2003).

<sup>80</sup> Bonnie and O'Connell (2003).

<sup>81</sup> Ulmer, Shabanova, and Preusser (2001).

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<sup>85</sup> DeJong (2002).



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