

# The American Issue

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## Beer Responsibility??

<http://www.beersoaksamerica.org/responsibility.htm>

Alcohol Policies Project / Center for Science in the Public Interest  
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Brewers claim to have spent nearly a half billion dollars over the past decade on "alcohol awareness and education programs" purporting to help prevent underage drinking and alcohol abuse and promoting "responsible drinking." Such programs typically include funding for research, public safety efforts, education, and underage drinking and alcohol abuse "prevention" campaigns. Industry public relations messages cite those efforts as evidence that the industry is part of the solution to reducing problems associated with the use of their products. Such messages routinely credit industry efforts with contributing to progress in reducing in underage drinking and alcohol harms. Despite those claims, there is no evidence that brewers' responsibility programs have been effective in combating societal alcohol problems.

In reality, brewers' and beer wholesalers' "responsibility" programs have been more effective as public relations tools than as serious prevention. They have provided political cover and diverted attention from the industry's heavy reliance on revenues generated by underage and heavy drinking. Whatever the sincerity of their intentions, brewers face an undeniable conflict of interest when it comes to any intervention that would effectively persuade anyone to drink less or discourage new customers from trying their products. Their first responsibility is to maximize revenues -- not promote public health.

### Consider the facts:

- Underage drinkers consumed between 10 and 20 percent of all alcohol downed in 2000, representing about \$11 to \$22 billion [dollars] in sales."<sup>1</sup>
- "The alcohol most favored by underage drinkers is beer."<sup>1</sup>
- "Heavy and binge drinking peak at age 21, and the top 20% of alcohol consumers account for about 87-89% of all of the alcohol consumed in the U.S."<sup>2</sup>
- "Most of the beer market derives from heavy drinking. The heaviest-drinking 10% of beer drinkers accounts for 43% of all reported beer consumption, and nearly 60% of all beer is consumed in amounts of five or more drinks per day. Beer drinking by the top five percent of drinkers accounts for more than half (55%) of all alcohol consumed in hazardous amounts."<sup>3</sup>
- "For every responsibility ad that aired in 2002 there were 226 alcohol product ads. For every dollar spent on responsibility ads in 2002, the industry spent \$99 on product ads."<sup>4</sup>

### Big Beer's "prevention" programs: Help or hindrance?

The beer industry has invested heavily in projecting an image of corporate responsibility and indirectly promoting its products through a variety of "responsible drinking" programs and public service announcements. Messages and slogans such as "drink responsibly," "think when you drink," and "know when to say when" do more to help build brand awareness and loyalty than they do to discourage problem drinking. In contrast with genuine prevention messages, industry-sponsored programs and slogans typically:

- Assume the fact of drinking;
- Place the blame for alcohol problems solely on individuals;
- Never define "safe" consumption;
- Focus on harm reduction (i.e. designated drivers), not discouraging heavy use;
- Fail to offer any warning about alcohol's risks;
- Fail to identify high-risk groups who should not drink at all.

While claiming to discourage "irresponsible" use of their products, brewers would actually suffer greatly if sales were limited to those who drink moderately. The moderate-drinking majority of beer consumers constitutes a relatively small market share, while heavy and underage drinkers represent by far the most lucrative market segment.

The industry is also keenly aware of the vital importance of attracting customers when they're young. Brewers' own marketing and business reports make no secret of the industry's intense interest in reaching younger drinkers, and the importance of "introductory drinkers" to the cultivation and expansion of the market for their products. Young people are known to develop brand loyalties -- and sometimes addictions -- that will stay with them for life. For those reasons, unless a company attracts a customer and establishes brand allegiance early, it may lose out on years of strong sales.

Moreover, the underage market itself is not inconsiderable. Experts estimate that more than 10 percent of all the beer sold in this country is downed by underage consumers -- a market that's worth more than \$5 billion each year.

#### **Advertising provides the primary source of "alcohol education" for youth.**

Whether by design or not, alcohol advertising routinely reaches large numbers of young people in broadcast, print, and outdoor settings with youth-oriented themes featuring humor, sex, sports, social acceptance, and fun. The ads permeate the culture (consider the broad penetration of Budweiser's "WHASSUP!" slogan) with messages that glorify and increase the appeal of drinking, and make it more acceptable. Children get the message that it's okay, like a fun, exciting game, and it's not risky or dangerous.

Those alcohol "education" messages are persuasive. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), studies among children and adolescents document that beer advertising has been linked to greater intentions to drink, favorable beliefs about beer, and a greater likelihood of drinking.

In contrast, research has confirmed that young people receive brewer-sponsored "alcohol awareness" messages with skepticism.<sup>5</sup> Study participants (ages 16 to 22 years old) deemed brewer-sponsored messages as less informative, believable, and effective than prevention messages sponsored by non-industry groups.

Moreover, brewers' commitment to "responsibility" programs pales in comparison to the billions beer producers spend enticing consumers -- young and old -- to drink. Sexy, glitzy, funny, hip and memorable beer ads -- many of them aired on youths' favorite TV shows -- provide a primary and extremely powerful source of "education" for young people about alcohol. Anheuser-Busch alone spends far more promoting alcohol in a given year than the \$465 million it claims to have spent on prevention over the past 20 years.<sup>4</sup>

#### **The bottom line.**

Kids are not consistently getting the message that drinking can be harmful, and they are certainly not going to get it from brewers. Despite the massive toll in dollars and lives, underage drinking prevention remains woefully neglected by the federal government. There is no coordinated national effort to address this serious youth health crisis. While the prevention of illicit drug and tobacco use receive considerable attention and support, underage drinking prevention has consistently been under-funded. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, prevention efforts are beginning to pay off in declining rates of teen smoking and street drug use. However, due to the absence of comparable efforts to combat underage drinking, alcohol use and binge drinking among teens continue at alarmingly high rates.

For this reason, the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine, in its ground-breaking September 2003 report to Congress, *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, recommended an adult-focused national media campaign on underage drinking prevention as the centerpiece of a comprehensive national strategy on underage drinking. The report underscored the need for a clear, consistent, visible federal voice and message on underage drinking prevention, and affirmed that responsibility for preventing youth alcohol use should not be delegated solely or primarily to the alcoholic beverage industry.

#### **References:**

1. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2004). *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*. Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking, Richard J. Bonnie and Mary Ellen O'Connell, Editors. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Online: <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309089352/html/>.
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3. Greenfield, T.K. & Rogers, J.D. (1999). Who drinks most of the alcohol in the U.S.? The policy implications. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 60(1):78-89.
4. Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (2004). *Fewer Drops in the Bucket: Alcohol Industry "Responsibility" Advertising Declined on Television in 2002*. Research Report. May 2004. Online: <http://camy.org/research/responsibility0504/>.
5. Atkin, C.K., DeJong, W. & Wallack, L. (1992). The influence of responsible drinking TV spots and automobile commercials on young drivers. Washington, DC: Automobile Association of America Foundation for Traffic Safety. Atkin, C., Smith, S. & Bang, H-K. (1994). How young viewers respond to televised drinking and driving messages. *Alcohol, Drugs, and Driving*. 10:263-275.

**Modest Mouse Drinking Made Cancers Grow Faster, Study Says**

"Join Together Online ([www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org))" May 2, 2007

Lab mice injected with breast-cancer cells and fed the equivalent of two alcoholic drinks daily developed tumors that were twice the weight of those in mice that did not ingest alcohol, researchers said.

Fox News reported April 30 that researcher Jian-Wei Gu of the University of Mississippi and colleagues said the four-week study indicated that alcohol use increased levels of a hormone called VEGF, which stimulates growth of blood vessels, which in turn caused tumors to grow faster. Researchers said that alcohol use increases cellular activity as the body tries to rid itself of the toxin.

Gu said that genetic risks for breast cancer are unavoidable, "alcohol [consumption] is the most important avoidable risk factor for women getting breast cancer."

The research was presented at the American Psychological Society's annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

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**ACAP Annual Meeting  
September 18-19, 2007  
Georgia Baptist Convention Center  
Duluth, Georgia**

Plans and preparations are underway for the annual ACAP meeting. H. Ray Newman, Ethics & Public Affairs, Georgia Baptist Convention is hosting the meeting in Duluth, Georgia, September 18-19, 2007, with the ACAP Executive Committee meeting on Monday evening, September 17.

The theme for the annual meeting is "Alcohol—A National Crisis."



**American Council on Alcohol Problems**  
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TO:

**PURPOSE:** American Council on Alcohol Problems is the channel of cooperation through which state temperance organizations, national religious bodies and similar concerned groups and individuals in America can unite to deal with the problems caused by alcohol and other drugs.

ACAP provides the forum and the mechanism through which concerned persons can find common ground on alcohol and other drug problems and address these issues with a united voice. It is the successor organization to the American Temperance League and the Anti-Saloon League established in 1895. Membership of ACAP presently is made up of 30 local temperance organizations, 22 national Christian denominations, and other fraternal organizations that support ACAP's philosophy of abstinence.

Individuals may enroll as "Abstinence Advocates" (associate members) of the American Council on Alcohol Problems by making an annual contribution of \$25 or more. (ACAP is classified by the IRS as a 501 (c)(3) tax-deductible charity.)

Checks should be made payable to:

**American Council on Alcohol Problems**

Mail to:

2376 Lakeside Drive, Birmingham, AL 35244

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**Chicago Study Finds Parents Are Primary Source of Alcohol for Middle School Youth, Other Sources Become More Prevalent by 8th Grade / Cesar Fax / May 14, 2007 / Volume 16 Issue 19 / www.cesar.umd.edu**

Parents or guardians are a predominant source of alcohol for young teens, according to a longitudinal study that followed Chicago public school students from 6th to 8th grade. More than one-third of alcohol-using youths entering 6th grade reported that they were given alcohol by parents or guardians the last time they drank alcohol, while 16% reported receiving it from another adult older than age 21. Very few reported obtaining alcohol from home (6%) or retail sources, such as a grocery or liquor store (2%). While decreasing over time, parents or guardians continued to remain the most common source of alcohol until the end of 8th grade, when youths who used alcohol were as likely to report that another adult older than age 21 was their most recent source as they were to report parents or guardians (23%). The authors suggest that "parents who provide their children with alcohol on special occasions or religious events may want to consider all the subsequent effects" and that "parental education about the need to eliminate, lock up and/or monitor alcohol in the home may be necessary" (p. 5). Studies have found that early initiation of alcohol use is associated with an increased risk of alcohol abuse and dependence at a later age (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 13, Issue 45). **NOTES:** Data are from 58 schools in Chicago that participated in all 4 data collection points of Project Northland Chicago (PNC), a group-randomized trial for the prevention of adolescent alcohol use. Alcohol use is defined as having a bottle or can of beer, a bottle or can of malt liquor, a glass of wine or wine cooler, or a flavored alcohol drink at least once in the past 12 months. The sample size increased over time because past year alcohol use increased with age. **SOURCE:** Adapted by CESAR from Hearst, M.O., Fulkerson, J.A., Maldonado-Molina, M.M., Perry, C.L., and Komro, K.A. "Who Needs Liquor Stores When Parents Will Do? The Importance of Social Sources of Alcohol Among Young Urban Teens," *Preventive Medicine* doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2007.02.018, 2007. For more information, contact Mary Hearst at onei0085@umn.edu.