

Excellence in Prevention – descriptions of the prevention programs and strategies with the greatest evidence of success

Name of Program/Strategy: Compliance Checks

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1. Overview and description

The systematic checking by law enforcement of whether a licensed establishment actually sells alcohol to underage persons or “underage looking persons”.

2. Implementation considerations (if available)

3. Descriptive information

Areas of Interest	Substance abuse prevention
Outcomes	
Outcome Categories	Alcohol
Ages	

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Gender	Male Female
Races/Ethnicities	American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino White Race/ethnicity unspecified
Settings	
Geographic Locations	Urban Suburban Rural and/or frontier Tribal
Implementation History	
NIH Funding/CER Studies	
Adaptations	
Adverse Effects	
IOM Prevention Categories	Universal

4. Outcomes

Scientific Evidence

Studies indicate regular compliance checks substantially reduce illegal alcohol sales (Grube, 1997b; Preusser et al., 1994), a result well established in literature on tobacco sales to teens (Difranza, Carlson, & Caisse, 1992; Hinds, 1992; Hoppock & Houston, 1990).

Studies of enforcement effects show that enforcement has reduced sales to youth (Preusser et al., 1994; Lewis et al., 1996; Scribner & Cohen, 2001).

There is some evidence that enforcement primarily affects the specific establishments targeted in compliance checks with limited diffusion and that any effects on sales may decay relatively quickly (Wagenaar et al., 2005b, 2005c).

Nationally, however, weak enforcement appears to be more the norm, with the result being that youth appear to have readily available access to alcohol (Jones-Webb et al., 1997b; Radecki & Strohl, 1991; Wagenaar et al., 1993).

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Forster et al. (1995) reported the results of an enforcement program conducted in 24 communities in Minnesota and Wisconsin. They found that buyers who were 21 years of age but looked underage were successful in buying alcohol about 50 percent of the time. Off-sale purchases were more successful if the clerks were male and the store was located in a residential area or mall. On-sale buys were more successful if the server looked under age 30, if the firm was a restaurant/bar combination as opposed to bar alone, and if warning signs were posted (likely because signs may have substituted for more substantive merchant educational programs).

Wagenaar and Wolfson (1994) found that, without adequate penalties, attempts to reduce underage retail sales were likely to be ineffective. Wagenaar and Wolfson (1994) reported that only 2 of every 1,000 occurrences of underage drinking resulted in arrest.

A recent study in Louisiana, (Cohen, Mason, & Scribner, 2002) used a repeated intervention design of a random sample of off sale alcohol outlets in New Orleans. The intervention was a compliance check carried out by the Louisiana Department of Beverage Control (ABC) and involved the use of “underage looking youth” who ranged from 17 to 22 to attempt to purchase alcohol in licensed outlets. At baseline on, 11.2 percent of outlets were compliant. Two months after the intervention, the level of compliance had increased to 39.9 percent. At 8 months after the intervention, there was a residual level of compliance even without any further media coverage.

- 5. Cost effectiveness report (Washington State Institute of Public Policy – if available)**
- 6. Washington State results (from Performance Based Prevention System (PBPS) – if available)**
- 7. Who is using this program/strategy**

Washington Counties	Oregon Counties

- 8. Study populations**
- 9. Quality of studies**

The documents below were reviewed for Quality of Research. The research point of contact can provide information regarding the studies reviewed and the availability of additional materials, including those from more recent studies that may have been conducted.

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Wagenaar, A. C., & Wolfson, M. (1995). Deterring sales and provision of alcohol to minors: A study of enforcement in 295 countries in four states. *Public Health Reports*, 110(4), 419-427.

10. Readiness for Dissemination

Revised Code of Washington

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) is the compilation of all permanent laws now in force. It is a collection of Session Laws (enacted by the Legislature, and signed by the Governor, or enacted via the initiative process), arranged by topic, with amendments added and repealed laws removed. It does not include temporary laws such as appropriations acts.

RCW 66.44.270—Furnishing Liquor to Minors

(1) It is unlawful for any person to sell, give, or otherwise supply liquor to any person under the age of twenty-one years or permit any person under that age to consume liquor on his or her premises or on any premises under his or her control. For the purposes of this subsection, "premises" includes real property, houses, buildings, and other structures, and motor vehicles and watercraft. A violation of this subsection is a gross misdemeanor punishable as provided for in chapter 9A.20 RCW.

11. Costs (if available)

12. Contacts

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
1 Choke Cherry Road
Rockville, MD 20857
(301) 407-6798

Learn More by Visiting: <https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/enforcementadjudication.aspx>