



WASHINGTON STATE COALITION TO REDUCE UNDERAGE DRINKING

Recommended Best Practices for Retailers of Alcohol Products

The Washington Coalition to Reduce Underage Drinking (RUaD) has identified retailer “best practices” intended to reduce the sale of spirits and other alcohol products to minors. These practices and procedures are based on state law, research on how to reduce sales to minors, and discussions with law enforcement personnel and retailers.¹ This list is not intended to be all-inclusive, and retailers may engage in additional practices to reduce underage sales.

1. Create and maintain a written sales policy. Retail establishments should have a written policy that stresses the importance of preventing sales to minors and over-intoxicated persons and identifies the practices and procedures that staff must follow for every sale involving alcohol. Each employee with responsibility for alcohol sales must read and sign the policy, which should be reviewed with the employee annually. The policy should reference state law where applicable and cover, at a minimum, the following:

- Anyone who appears to be under age 30 must be asked for ID.
- What forms of ID are acceptable (Acceptable Identification at: liq.wa.gov/print/5550).
- How to check an ID and how to recognize false or altered ID (Tips for Checking ID at: liq.wa.gov/publications/licensing/RVP/LIQ%20075%20RVP%20Checking%20ID.pdf)
- What to do if an ID appears to be fake or if a 3rd party sale is suspected.
- When and how a sale should be refused for a customer who cannot provide acceptable ID or who is apparently intoxicated, and whom to call if there are difficulties.
- Use of a 'log book' to document alcohol sales refusals.
- Staff under age 18 should not handle alcohol sales, and staff age 18-20 should only sell under adult supervision.
- Consequences for an employee who sells to a minor or an apparently intoxicated person.

¹ These practices also draw on the "RRForum Recommended Practices for Off-Premises Alcohol Retailers," developed by law enforcement, attorney general staff, retailers, researchers, and producers under the leadership of the national Responsible Retailing Forum. The Federal Trade Commission has stated that every retailer should adopt the RRForum practices in order to reduce teen access to alcohol (<http://business.ftc.gov/documents/alcohol-retailers-can-help-reduce-teen-drinking>).

Recommended Best Practices for Retailers of Alcohol Products

2. Train management and staff on alcohol sales policy. All staff should be fully trained before being permitted to sell spirits and other alcohol products. The training plan should include:

- Information on the health and safety risks of underage consumption ('The Facts: Underage Drinking' at: liq.wa.gov/education/facts-underage-drinking).
- Review of store policies and state and local laws concerning the sale and marketing of alcohol products (see Practice #1, previous page).
- How to use the store's age-verification equipment to check ID.
- How to request and check an ID and how to deny a sale in a non-confrontational manner.

3. Monitor staff conduct. Management should rigorously monitor staff conduct to ensure that the store's policies and procedures are being followed. A high-level employee should be designated to oversee compliance with store policies and procedures and state laws concerning the sale and marketing of alcohol products and to receive all notices of violation. Quality control strategies include:

- Training store managers how to best implement store policies and procedures and on the training and supervision of clerks.
- Conducting frequent, random alcohol purchase surveys and "mystery shop" inspections to provide feedback to managers and staff on staff performance. These inspections use of age adults that appear under the legal age and attempt to purchase alcohol.²
- Prompt review of mystery shop and law enforcement results with all staff; feedback to staff who fail to check IDs should include counseling and retraining.³
- Reviewing point of sale video tapes, cash register data, and other internal monitoring systems and meeting with staff to assess problems with implementation.
- Ongoing reinforcement of training (e.g., meeting with staff, issuing e-mail and other periodic reminders, circulating relevant publications) with at least annual refresher trainings.
- Considering compliance in performance appraisals and employment decisions; rewarding positive performance.

4. Employ security practices to reduce theft. Managers should design the store, institute practices, and install equipment to reduce theft of spirits and other alcohol products. All thefts should be reported to law enforcement. Practices to reduce theft may include:⁴

² Stores must receive prior written approval from the Liquor Control Board and give written notice to staff describing the program and consequences of an employee's failure to comply before commencing mystery shops. (WAC 314.21.015)

³ Employees may not be terminated solely for a first failure to comply with policies during a mystery shop. (WAC 314.21.025)

⁴ There are numerous sources of information within the retailer community on how to prevent theft; see, e.g., http://retail.about.com/od/lossprevention/ht/cs_shoplifting.htm

Recommended Best Practices for Retailers of Alcohol Products

- Keeping alcohol products in a separate, well-lit location with unobstructed views that permit staff to easily monitor activity.
- Using security equipment such as closed circuit television, security tags, and two-way mirrors. Uniformed security guards are also powerful visual deterrents to a shoplifter.
- Monitoring parking areas and sidewalks.
- Prominent display of anti-theft signage.
- Requiring that customers pass by the register area to exit the store.
- Scheduling an adequate number of staff to work at any given time.
- Staff greeting every customer who enters the store, if possible.
- Performing inventory on a regular basis.
- Placing more expensive spirits items under lock and key.
- Prohibiting employees from drinking on the job.
- Explaining your store's anti-theft policies to staff, including the consequences if a staff member is caught stealing or assisting in theft.

5. Keep records. Accountability for the sale of alcohol products is critical and is strengthened by maintaining records. Retailers should:

- Document all trainings, law enforcement compliance checks, mystery shop and alcohol purchase survey results, and disciplinary actions related to sales to minors.
- Use a log book to document all alcohol sales refusals, thefts, and unusual occurrences.
- Require each employee to sign a written acknowledgment of alcohol laws and store policy annually.

6. Don't market to youth. Alcohol marketing influences young persons' attitudes and behaviors, encouraging youth consumption.⁵

- Remove or reduce the number of outward-facing alcohol ads from store windows.
- Don't display youth-oriented advertising for alcohol products in your store (e.g., no ads with youthful models or with sports or entertainment stars popular with youth).
- Place alcohol products in an area in the store that does not contain products popular with youth such as sodas, energy drinks, snack foods, and candy, and confine alcohol advertising materials to that area.

⁵ Anderson P, De Bruijn A, Angus K, et al. Impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on adolescent alcohol use: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 2009; 44:229-43; Smith LA, Foxcroft DR. The effect of alcohol advertising, marketing and portrayal on drinking behaviour in youth people: Systematic review of prospective cohort studies. *BMC Public Health* 2009; 9:1-11; Stoolmiller M, Wills TA, McClure AC, et al. Comparing media and family predictors of alcohol use: A cohort study of US adolescents. *BMJ* 2012; 2:e000543.

Recommended Best Practices for Retailers of Alcohol Products

- Don't advertise alcohol products in college or high school publications, or outdoors near schools and playgrounds.
- Don't carry products that particularly appeal to youth, e.g., alcopops, jello shots.

7. Communicate with the public. Retailers serve their communities when they let customers know about their commitment to enforcing the legal age of purchase and the importance of preventing teen access to alcohol.

- Prominently post signs deterring illegal purchase (e.g., Acceptable ID in Washington State and No Sales to Minors signs) and the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome sign (LCB website: liq.wa.gov/licensing/responsible-vendor-program).
- Establish working relationships with law enforcement.
- Get involved in industry associations and with your community, including substance abuse prevention coalitions, to express your commitment to prevent underage sales and use.

Remember: Responsible Retailing is a management responsibility. Every aspect of alcohol sales imposes a responsibility on management to oversee and respond. Continually emphasizing with staff the importance of preventing underage sales is the surest way for owners and managers to avoid penalties and liability for themselves, their store, their employees, and their customers. By doing so, your business will be an active partner in your community's efforts to avoid the serious harms to young persons and others that result from underage alcohol use. In short, being a responsible retailer is good for you, your business, and your community.

Follow the 'Three C's' of Responsible Retailing: Commitment (at all levels: owner, manager, staff) plus Communication (internally and externally) equals Compliance (no sales to minors or apparently intoxicated persons).

For more information, please use the “contact us” tab on RUaD’s www.StartTalkingNow.org website.