

July 13, 1998

TO: Santa Clara County Violence Prevention Council

FROM: Policy Sub-committee on Alcohol

SUBJECT: Draft Alcohol Policy Recommendations

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Alcohol is the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States, contributing to more than 100,000 deaths annually. Many studies have found a consistent relationship between alcohol consumption and violence -- including homicides, assaults and trauma cases. Alcohol also contributes to the frequency and severity of any violence that does occur. Alcohol increases the likelihood of aggression, and is the drug most clearly associated with violence.

Alcohol is the (illegal) drug of choice of youth in this country. According to State and Federal surveys, alcohol is overwhelmingly and consistently the most widely used drug at all adolescent age levels. Most people start drinking during early adolescence, and the earlier a child begins alcohol use, the earlier he or she will exhibit problem behavior and become a heavy alcohol-user as an adult.

There is a high correlation between adolescent alcohol consumption and crime, suicide, drowning, truancy, and driving under the influence. According to a USDHHA national survey, 28% of high-school seniors and 44% of college students reported binge drinking (5+ drinks for men 4+ drinks for women) as recently as two weeks before being surveyed. Researchers have described alcohol as a "gateway drug." Adolescent drinkers are more likely than non-drinkers to use illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin. Studies show that adults who were adolescent drinkers are six times more likely to be regular cocaine users than adults who did not drink as adolescents.

The costs associated with alcohol use are enormous. As a result, reducing alcohol-related problems is a high priority of many communities throughout the United States. However, traditional programs that have focused on educating young people about the risks of alcohol and persuading them through deterrence, mass media, and other strategies to reduce or eliminate alcohol use have had limited impact. These strategies, which have focused on individuals' behaviors, typically have not incorporated broader, community-based strategies. The absence of this connection limits opportunities for individual-based strategies to be successful.

The following policy recommendations are intended to contribute to an environmental approach to the prevention of alcohol-related problems. Environmental-based prevention strategies recognize that alcohol-related problems are the result of a complex interaction of individuals and the environment within which they live. Through policy reform environmental prevention strategies seek to change community norms, standards, and practices concerning alcohol.

These recommendations encourage the County to take the lead role to develop policies under its jurisdiction. They also provide a mechanism to coordinate the training and education of county-wide stakeholders to develop and implement proven strategies to reduce the incidence and prevalence of alcohol problems.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

* Billboards

Billboard advertising is an issue of growing concern to communities across America for the following reasons:

- * Studies have shown that alcohol beverage advertising has a profound influence on creating favorable attitudes about alcohol among youth.
- * These promotions subject--including our children--to involuntary and unavoidable forms of solicitation.
- * Alcoholic beverages are heavily advertised. The alcohol beverage industry spends more than \$93 million annually for outdoor advertising.
- * Children are often exposed to billboards advertising alcohol while walking to school or playing in their neighborhoods, and there is no practical way for parents to monitor or limit their exposure to these public advertisements.

The proposed ordinance regulating outdoor advertising is a reasonable and necessary means to protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of youth in Santa Clara County.

What we can do now

We recommend that the County Board of Supervisors develop and implement a County-wide policy to regulate outdoor (i.e., billboard) alcohol advertisements situated on County property. *UNINCORP*
The Board could direct County Counsel to convene a broad-based constituency of interested individuals to use a model ordinance specifically designed to regulate billboards and other forms of outdoor alcohol advertisements.

With coordination and resources

The Board could direct County Counsel to coordinate the training and education of all municipal planning departments and other interested community constituencies in Santa Clara County to use this model to regulate all outdoor alcohol advertisements.

* Responsible Beverage Service (RBS)

We recognize that selling and serving of alcohol is a legitimate activity and that the County seeks to encourage safe and responsible alcohol practices in an environment which fosters the health and safety of our community.

Historically, many off-sale and on-sale alcohol establishments have required increased levels of service from law enforcement agencies, resulting from alcohol-related problems such as public disturbances, physical altercations, drunkenness and drunk driving, drug use, loitering, public nudity, and underage drinking.

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This recommendation is intended to promote a healthy business environment by establishing consistent standards for the safe operation of retail alcohol outlets to prevent alcohol-related problems.

What we can do now

We recommend that the county Board of Supervisors direct County Counsel to establish County-wide policy to require both on-site drinking establishments and retail alcohol outlets (e.g., convenience stores, supermarkets, liquor stores, restaurants ect.) to establish responsible-server policies and to train all employees in responsible beverage service techniques. This policy would apply to all unincorporated County property, the SCC Fair, and activities sanctioned by the county such as festivals or street fairs.

With coordination and resources

The Board of Supervisors could direct County Counsel to coordinate the training and education of all municipal planning departments in Santa Clara County to develop their own specific RBS ordinances.

*** Zoning Ordinances**

Conditional Use Permit (CUP) Ordinances

Public-health research has demonstrated that the more alcohol is available , the more people drink; and that when people drink more, they create more alcohol-related problems. There is evidence that alcohol availability can negatively affect community norms and behavior. We are more aware that alcohol is a dangerous drug and are now using strategies to reduce alcohol availability where there are public health and safety concerns.

When Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) systems were established in 1933, each state defined local power and authority over liquor licensing. Currently, California's licensing system relies primarily on State authority. However, there is an exception to the strong ABC powers in California which provides bona fide opportunities for local action. Under the California Business & Professional Code # 23790, the ABC may not issue a liquor license if it violates an existing local zoning ordinance. City and county governments have the constitutional authority to regulate land use to protect the health, welfare, and safety of citizens. Active zoning laws for retail alcohol business are generally called Conditional Use Permit (CUP) Ordinances and are used to give the surrounding community extra security before a potential license is granted.

What we can do now

We recommend that the County Board of Supervisors direct County Counsel to review its existing commercial-- zoning district ordinances (CUP) for licensed alcohol establishments on unincorporated County property (both on-sale and off-sale premises). This review will consider the general provisions presently in place to determine if they are weak or out dated. The County can establish the strongest possible active-review process to guard against over concentration or undue concentration of outlets.

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With coordination and resources

The County Board of Supervisors could direct County Counsel to coordinate the training and education of all municipal planning departments in Santa Clara County in the use of model ordinances such as the CUP or the City of Oakland's "Deemed Approved" ordinance to develop ordinances that meet their specific needs.

*** Sponsorship**

As alcohol sales have declined, the alcohol industry has turned to the mechanism of targeting specific populations to ensure their bottom line--higher profits. "Targeted marketing" involves the development and strategic placement of messages designed to reach a specific population such as youth, Latinos, African Americans, women, etc. The alcohol industry is effective at what they do and have mastered the development of images and slogans to promote their products.

The alcohol industry would like to associate their products with everyone's identity. By wearing a logo t-shirt, a baseball cap, or countless other promotional items, they send a message: power, speed, skill, and joy will be yours if you use their products.

Concerts, county and community fairs, cultural, and artistic events present sponsorship opportunities to the alcohol industry which allow them to expose young people to alcohol advertising and promotion. Although the industry insists that its intention is to target legal drinkers, large numbers of those who attend these events are under 21. Furthermore, alcohol consumption and intoxication has been related to violence at festivals sponsored by the alcohol industry.

What we can do now

We recommend that the County Board of Supervisors establish a County-wide policy to prohibit alcohol sponsorship at the County Fair; on all other County owned property; and at all County-sponsored events. This policy should include provisions to prohibit the distribution of promotional items and the prohibition of brand name associated with the events.

With coordination and resources

The County Board of Supervisors could direct County Counsel to coordinate the training and education of all special-event sponsors, municipal planning departments, and other interested community constituencies in Santa Clara County to develop their own promotional and sponsorship policies and training; and to provide technical assistance on the availability of alternative sponsorships.

*** Advertising**

Regulating store-window advertising of alcohol products

Advertisements for alcohol products saturate our environment. These displays bombard everyone passing by. This problem is more prevalent in less affluent ethnic communities. A study has shown there are five times more advertisements in Latino Communities.

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Advertising has been shown to influence youth's perception of the acceptability and desirability of alcoholic beverages. Constraining alcohol advertising is a regulatory alternative that is gaining increasing attention today. However, Santa Clara County has a strong ordinance with a low priority on enforcement.

What we can do now

We recommend that the County Board of Supervisors enforce its existing policy which regulates window signs on all on-and off-site alcohol establishments on unincorporated County property, to restrict permanent and temporary signs to a maximum of 10% of window coverage or 100 square feet (which ever is the lowest amount).

With coordination and resources

The County Board of Supervisors could direct County Counsel to coordinate the training and education of all municipal planning departments to amend their sign ordinances in accordance with County standards. The Board could also direct the coordination of a County-wide law-enforcement effort to enforce these policies.

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Alcohol Taxes

Most states, including California, do not permit local jurisdictions to impose alcohol taxes; this authority resides with the state. However, research has shown that raising taxes on alcohol is the single most effective strategy for decreasing alcohol-related problems among young people. Various studies have established that increases in price reduce drinking-- particularly among youth because, this group is more sensitive to beverage prices. One study showed that raising the cost of beer by 10 cents decreases consumption as much as raising the drinking age by one year.

The following recommendation is consistent with the 1990 Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors' position on supporting proposition 134 (the Alcohol Tax Initiative).

What we can do now

We recommend that the County Board of Supervisors adopt a formal position to reform alcohol tax policy at the State and Federal level. This policy would:

- * Adjust beer and distilled-spirit taxes for past inflation

Failure to maintain the real value of alcohol taxes is one reason why alcohol prices have been dropping steadily.

- * Index alcohol prices to the consumer price index

This will eliminate the erosive impact of future inflation so that alcohol taxes increase each year at the same rate as inflation.

- * Equalize taxes across beverages by alcohol content

Taxes on distilled spirits are substantially higher than taxes on beer and wine, even though beer and wine pose similar dangers to public health and safety.

With coordination and resources

The County Board of Supervisors could direct staff to support alcohol-tax policy reforms throughout the County and direct staff to coordinate the training and education of all municipalities in Santa Clara County on alcohol-tax policy reform.

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*** Supporting the enforcement of existing pro-health and safety laws**

The alcohol industry has succeeded in protecting its economic interests, despite the adverse impact of its products on public health and widespread public support for alcohol policy reform. This powerful and influential industry consistently challenges and erodes existing alcohol policies designed to protect health and safety. Yet, the strength of communities and their elected representatives lies in their commitment to fundamental societal change. Government plays a critical role in alcohol policy and its decisions have profound implications for the prevention of alcohol-related problems.

What we can do now

We recommend that the County Board of Supervisors adopt a formal position to challenge alcohol industry legislative efforts designed to erode existing laws that protect the health and safety of county residents.

With coordination and additional resources

The County Board of Supervisors could direct County Counsel to coordinate the training and education of governmental and other interested community constituencies to support and advocate for stricter enforcement of existing alcohol and other drug policies which protect public health and safety.

*** Increased funding for prevention and early intervention**

Prevention seeks to address a problem before it begins and looks at all the factors which affect those who use alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol and other drug problems impose not only financial costs to society but, more importantly, cause real pain and suffering among those afflicted. Youth often suffer particularly serious consequences because alcohol and other drugs prevent them from reaching their intellectual, social, and emotional potential. Identifying alcohol and other drug problems among youth and making resources available to meet their needs must be made a high priority.

What we can do now

We recommend that the County Board of Supervisors adopt a formal position to prioritize the funding of proven and promising prevention and early intervention strategies to reduce the incidence and prevalence of alcohol and other drug-related problems in Santa Clara County.

With coordination and additional resources

The County Board of Supervisors could direct advocacy efforts at the State and national level to request for additional funding for alcohol and other drug prevention efforts.

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