



California Alcoholic Beverage Control
Response to
U. S. Surgeon General's Call to Action on Preventing Underage Drinking

Underage drinking is a systemic problem with serious consequences for youth, families and communities. Experience and research suggests that it is best addressed using an integrative multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted approach. As the agency responsible for licensing and regulating 75,000 businesses that manufacture, distribute, and sell alcoholic beverages in this state, the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) is firmly committed to reducing the availability of alcoholic beverages to minors and combating underage drinking.

In California, underage drinking is a significant public safety concern. In 2004, nearly half of the 1400 Californians killed in alcohol-related crashes were under the age of 21. In some communities, such as in Fresno County, children are taking their first drink at the age of nine years old. ABC recognizes that without dedicating extensive resources to this problem, young lives will continue to be lost and communities will remain vulnerable to the effects of this problem.

ABC has made enforcement of underage drinking laws a priority. Through our Grant Assistance Program, we have distributed nearly 17-1/2 million dollars in grant money to 235 local law enforcement agencies in the past 10 years to help curb underage drinking and enforce laws that protect the safety of California's citizens. Since 2002, we have distributed another nine million dollars in grant funds to expand technical assistance and provide training to law enforcement agencies, university campuses, and various community-based organizations to curb underage drinking and alcohol availability to minors.

Recently, ABC began running its own minor decoy and shoulder tap programs and has increased the number of sales to minor arrests by 270% in the last five years. Within the past year, we have also increased the number of disciplinary actions against businesses where alcoholic beverages have been sold to minors by 65%. As a result of these enforcement efforts, we have seen a 4% decline in sales to minor violations.

In addition to strong enforcement efforts, ABC, through its Licensee Education on Alcohol and Drugs (LEAD) Program, provided training in 2005 to over 19,000 alcohol industry employees on laws and steps to prevent sales to minors. Furthermore, in 2002, ABC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with several University of California and California State University campuses to work together to reduce binge drinking and create safer environments for youth attending college in one of the two largest university systems in this country. ABC is also partnering with the youth organization, Friday Night Live, to recruit and develop a ready supply of decoys to work with Department investigators.

State alcoholic beverage control regulatory agencies play a key role in reducing underage drinking. Only through the combined effects of strong enforcement at the state and local levels, coupled with multi-disciplinary approaches to prevention and education, can we expect to see real progress in this area. A commitment to include state regulatory agencies in discussions and funding opportunities is imperative if we are, as a society, to bring about the environmental change necessary to reduce this serious public health concern.