

# COMMUNITY COALITION ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY ANALYSIS & PLAN

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## **Introduction to Environmental Analysis and Strategic Planning For Community Prevention Coalitions**

**Winter 2008**

### **Background**

Environmental strategies represent one of three critical components of a comprehensive approach to prevention and intervention to reduce alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse or any other public health problem. The public health model calls for analyzing and addressing disease (or any problem) by identifying factors related to the host (the individual), the agent (the substance or organism that transmits the disease or problem) and the environment in which hosts encounter various disease agents.

**Host** - In the case of youth substance abuse, the hosts are young people. Each young person has many factors that increase (risk factors) or decrease (protective factors) the likelihood of using, abusing and ultimately suffering a problem related to use of a substance. Risk factors include knowledge, attitudes and perceptions that favor use of substances; personality characteristics such as sensation seeking, impulsiveness and rebelliousness and; physiological characteristics including physical condition and genetics. Major protective factor areas include skills, opportunity and rewards. Specific protective factors include perceived harm from substance use, attachment to school and family, clear family rules and discipline and involvement in and rewards for positive activities in school, community and family.

**Agent** – The agents with which substance abuse prevention is concerned are potentially harmful in a variety of ways. For example, alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that impairs motor ability and cognition. Alcohol is also toxic in that it harms human tissue and can lead to brain and liver damage, several cancers and even death from alcohol poisoning. Alcohol is also addictive, that is, users can become psychologically dependant and physically addicted going into physical withdrawal symptoms if alcohol is removed. As an agent, most drugs are difficult or impossible to alter to make them safe.

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**Environment** – Environmental factors that influence substance abuse fall into several categories. Environmental factors can influence the choice to use, or how much to use. They also can affect the consequences of use. In the case of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs it is helpful to categorize environmental factors into the areas of potential prevention or intervention influence.

*Laws, Regulations and Policies* – Society has long recognized the negative public health, as well as legal and social consequences resulting from the use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances. Social and political norms change constantly and a myriad of federal, state and local laws have been enacted to control access to dangerous substances. Other than alcohol and tobacco, the non-medicinal use, possession and sale of most drugs and psychoactive substances are essentially forbidden. Alcohol and tobacco are treated as consumer products and most laws are aimed at orderly sales to the public. Some of these laws are intended to reduce the harm or risk from the use of alcohol or tobacco, e.g. age restrictions on sale, while others are primarily meant to generate revenues for government e.g. excise tax, fees for licenses to sell. Historically, the balance between free commerce and assuring the public's safety has fallen heavily in favor of the alcohol and tobacco industries.

Laws governing individuals' behaviors are more common. For example, most laws aimed at reducing impaired driving place responsibility on the driver while tobacco control is generally in the form of prohibiting smokers from using tobacco in public places. These laws are meant to create a deterrence effect where individuals refrain from use out of concern for legal consequences.

State and local governments, as well as public and private organizations have enacted policies related to use of alcohol and/or tobacco as well as other drugs. Many employers have strict drug-free workplace policies and some offer Employee Assistance Programs to intervene with employees who develop substance abuse problems.

Organizations that sponsor or conduct events to which the public is invited also can enact policies about allowing alcohol or tobacco at such events as well as policies for providing alcohol in a legal and safe manner.

*Access/Cost* - The extent and nature of use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, like any other consumer product, is related to the ease of access and actual and perceived cost. Access includes such factors as location of retail outlets, time of sales and other conditions. Cost is the total expenditure of time, money (price), inconvenience and other efforts associated with obtaining a substance. Many laws are intended to affect access. Since the mid-1980s every state has laws setting the minimum legal drinking age at 21. Most states have some form of restrictions on the number or density of licensed outlets for alcohol. Recent dramatic increases in state and local taxes on cigarettes have driven the price of tobacco to all-time highs with a corresponding drop in sales. Alcohol, however, has failed to keep pace with the overall consumer price index (CPI) with few meaningful increases in excise tax. The New York State tax on beer was not increased between 1967 and 2009 a period during which the CPI increased over 500%. The result is that alcohol is a volume business relying on increased sales to make profits.

Regulating hours of sales and types of promotions and discounts are common methods of controlling access to alcohol.

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*Norms* - Norms that influence substance use are complex with some of the most influential norms being some of the most subtle. Alcohol has been used as a mind altering drug for thousands of years. Alcohol has become an integral part of celebrations of births, marriages and deaths. It is used to celebrate victory and to ease the pain of defeat. It is the great social lubricant used to reduce the fear of intimacy and to give the courage to fight. In the past few decades the modern media age has given the alcohol industry powerful tools to shape the image of alcohol as essential to fun, romance and sophistication. The alcohol industry also takes every opportunity to depict alcohol as an acceptable part of every kind of event. Alcohol sponsorship of sports and entertainment helps to promote this positive image. Promoting the inclusion of alcohol in social events including fund raising events for worthy causes also promotes the positive image of both alcohol and the alcohol industry. Alcohol manufacturers also spend significant money for product placement in movies with products featured in scenes geared toward target populations. The primary target population is young, including underage, audiences.

Cigarette smoking enjoyed an image of sophistication as recently as 25 years ago fostered in the movies of the 40s and 50s. Even after documentation of serious health consequences of smoking, clearly established in the 1960s, cigarette smoking was still an accepted norm. Decades of prevention education including warning labels on cigarette packages, made gradual inroads into the positive norm of smoking. The discovery of the health consequences of second hand smoke, a series of successful lawsuits against the tobacco companies, and state and local restrictions on smoking in restaurants turned the tide and shifted public support toward norms that support controlling or eliminating smoking.

Among illegal substances, marijuana is the drug of choice and is subject of countless college student term papers calling for legalization. Since the 1960s marijuana has been a symbol of rebellion and civil disobedience with such unlikely allies as individuals from groups as diverse as aging 60s hippies, college students and motorcycle enthusiasts.

For young people, decisions regarding use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are complex and are strongly influenced by their perception of parental, peer and community norms as well as the image created by the media. Student surveys consistently indicate that high school students believe that their parents disapprove of illegal drugs and do not condone tobacco use but have far less disapproval of alcohol. Parent surveys have found that more than nine of ten parents disapprove of tobacco or other drug use by young people yet one in three parents believe that their teenage children should be allowed to drink or be taught to drink responsibly before they are 21. Most teens also believe their peers do not condone tobacco or illegal drug use but have far more liberal attitudes toward alcohol.

Changing norms, or perceptions of norms, will involve education (or re-education) for young people, their parents and the community. It also will involve a consumer protection approach to counter deceptive advertising and public image shaping campaigns of the alcohol, tobacco and other drug industries.

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## **Environmental Assessment**

The attached matrix provides a guide for conducting an assessment of the status of environmental factors and potential prevention intervention strategies. The matrix represents a model for coalition members to take an organized approach to assessing the status and feasibility of a variety of strategies to address environmental factors influencing alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. The sample matrix provides examples of laws, regulations and policies; access and costs and; norms related to alcohol. Similar matrices should be constructed for tobacco and other substances of interest to the coalition.

There are a variety of activities that can be used to complete the assessment.

**Laws, regulations and Policies** - Completing the analysis and generating a strategic environmental plan requires collecting information on state and local laws and regulations through a review of existing laws. Recent increased interest in alcohol policy has resulted in several thorough reviews of state laws. Local laws can be accessed by coalition members by interviewing law enforcement and judicial professionals and by searching local statutes.

Public and private organizations often enact policies regarding alcohol and tobacco use. These can be cataloged by conducting interviews with organization representatives and obtaining copies of written policies. Organizations that sponsor or hold events at which alcohol is served should be contacted to assess policies and procedures.

**Access and Cost** - Assessing access to and cost of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can include structured observational studies in which trained volunteers record prices of alcohol and tobacco products in local retailers. Coalition members can also contact local law enforcement agencies and state liquor authority enforcement agents to access data on results of compliance checks and other enforcement efforts. State liquor authorities can also provide data on the number, type and location of licensed outlets.

Young people's perceptions of access, availability and deterrence can be measured by student surveys.

**Norms** - Student surveys are also a prime source of information about young people's perceptions of parental, peer and community norms. Parent and community surveys, focus groups and other point of contact data collection methods can be used to measure norms related to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Coalition members can conduct a structured review of local media presentation of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs including tracking the frequency and content of advertising to which young people might be exposed.

Communities Mobilizing to Control Alcohol (CMCA) is an evidence-based strategy using volunteers to conduct structured interviews with friends, neighbors and other community members to determine perceptions related to underage drinking including concerns and suggestions for acceptable control strategies.

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## **Environmental Strategic Plan**

Based on the results of the Environmental Assessment, gaps will be identified. Strategies that have been shown to be effective can be reviewed and the feasibility of each can be determined. The final step is to set priorities on environmental strategies based on needs, gaps and feasibility.

Environmental strategic planning should follow the same steps as any strategic planning process with needs assessment (environmental assessment described above), resource assessment and gaps analysis. Once gaps are identified, an analysis of the availability of evidence-based strategies should be conducted. This analysis should address available resources and political feasibility.

Action plans for each selected strategy should then be developed.

Evaluation of environmental strategies needs to include analyses of longitudinal data and should try to include collection of data that exposure to strategies. For example, if a campaign is targeted at parents' norms it is critical to determine if parents exposed to the campaign change their norms more than parents not exposed. In the case of local policy changes it might be possible to compare changes in behavior in the coalition's community over time to the same time series in another similar community in which policy changes were not made.





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<b>Norms</b>							
<b>Target Problem</b>	<b>Environmental Risk Factor</b>	<b>Environmental Strategy-Activity</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>	<b>Assessment Measure</b>	<b>Challenges &amp; Barriers</b>	<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
“Normalized” image of alcohol	Perceived lack of alternatives	Promotion of alcohol free events					
	Alcohol promoted as safe and good.	Restrictions on alcohol promotion by alcohol providers					
	Need for clear institutional norms	Alcohol-free school policies and procedures					
	Alcohol promoted as safe and good.	Outdoor Advertising Regulations					
	Alcohol promoted as safe and good.	Warnings on all advertising					
	Alcohol promoted as safe and good.	Distribute accurate information about policies and practices					
	Alcohol promoted as safe and good.	Counter-advertising efforts					
	Alcohol promoted as safe and good.	Media advocacy to create attention to substance use issues					
	Alcohol promoted as safe and good.	Distribute accurate information re: risks					



