



ALCOHOL BILLBOARDS

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR - ALCOHOL BILLBOARDS

NOTE: Follow the instructions in the opinion section of your local newspaper for submitting a letter to the editor. Most newspapers print these instructions in the opinion-editorial section, or you can call the newspaper for instructions.

ISSUE: Alcohol Billboards In Our Community

Have you noticed that billboards are becoming more and more plentiful in our neighborhoods? If you're like me, maybe you haven't given these huge signs much thought, until now. I've noticed that the billboards in our neighborhoods are demanding more and more attention - from us and from our kids. And this is especially disturbing because so many of these billboards are advertising alcohol.

Alcohol billboard advertising is of particular concern to me and to a growing number of concerned citizens in this community. These signs are unavoidable and their messages reach all of us, regardless of age. Not to mention their overall impact on the visual atmosphere of our neighborhoods.

I think most of us can agree that underage kids shouldn't be drinking alcohol. So why can't we also agree that our kids don't need to be bombarded with ads about a product we don't want them to use? In fact, the product is illegal for everyone under age 21.

Although it may be difficult to ban alcohol billboards altogether, I'm part of a group who is willing to take actions to minimize billboard advertising right here in [INSERT NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD]. If you'd like to join us, please contact [INCLUDE YOUR GROUP NAME AND A PHONE NUMBER, IF APPLICABLE].

Sincerely,

Include your name and group name here

Source: FACE Truth and Clarity on Alcohol.



SAMPLE BILLBOARD SURVEY FORM

Address of Billboard: _____

City: _____

What Company is advertising: _____

Type of sign:

Area:

<input type="checkbox"/> Junior poster (75 sq ft)	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial
<input type="checkbox"/> Poster panel (300 sq ft)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed residential / commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> Painted bulletin (672 sq ft)	<input type="checkbox"/> Central business district
	<input type="checkbox"/> Strip commercial

Neighborhood:

Neighborhood is predominately:

<input type="checkbox"/> Residential	<input type="checkbox"/> Black
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic district	<input type="checkbox"/> Latino
	<input type="checkbox"/> White
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Can you see any of the following:

The ad is for:

<input type="checkbox"/> Residences	<input type="checkbox"/> Wine
<input type="checkbox"/> Parks	<input type="checkbox"/> Beer
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic sites	<input type="checkbox"/> Liquor / spirits
<input type="checkbox"/> Hospitals	<input type="checkbox"/> Malt liquor
<input type="checkbox"/> Churches	
<input type="checkbox"/> Schools	



Does the billboard ad contain:

If the ad shows people, estimate their age:

<input type="checkbox"/> Animals	<input type="checkbox"/> Under 18
<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol product	<input type="checkbox"/> 18 to 20
<input type="checkbox"/> Cartoons	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 21
<input type="checkbox"/> Minorities	
<input type="checkbox"/> Logo of the alcohol company	
<input type="checkbox"/> People	

Beyond drinking, what does the billboard promote?

Photo taken?

	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	If yes, attach to the survey.

Please record the advertising copy on the billboard:

Side 1: _____

Side 2: _____

How many other billboards are visible nearby? _____

Total number of billboards in an eight block area: _____

Total number of alcohol billboards in this eight block area: _____

Your Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Your age: _____



SUGGESTIONS FOR LIMITING OR CONTROLLING BILLBOARD ADVERTISING

To limit or control billboards at the local level, the following initial activities are helpful:

- Gather information about sign ordinances, zoning, and how billboards are currently regulated, permitted, and taxed.
- Find allies among community leaders, neighborhood groups, health organizations, chambers of commerce, and others.
- Conduct a billboard survey. Find out how many billboards, where, what neighborhoods, near what (schools, churches, etc.), what size, and what they advertise.
- Write a report of your survey findings.
- Conduct a press conference. Include letter-writing campaigns, news coverage, endorsements, and other activities.
- Petition city or county government for a moratorium on new signs.
- Know your opposition. The billboard industry is well-funded and experienced in fighting these efforts.

Source: Edward McMahon and Patricia Taylor, Citizens' Action Handbook on Alcohol and Tobacco Billboard Advertising. Center for Science in the Public Interest, Washington DC and Scenic America, Washington, DC, 1990, pp. 6-9.



SUGGESTED POLICY ACTIONS ON ALCOHOL BILLBOARD ADVERTISING

Successful community action can reduce the number of billboards. Once you have done your background work, the following steps are possible.

- **Pass a City Ordinance Banning Construction of New Billboards.** A temporary moratorium banning new billboards is an important first step in efforts to regulate billboard advertising. It gives the community time to proceed in a measured fashion with their regulatory steps, and prevents the billboard industry from quickly erecting dozens of new billboards before a decision is made.
- **Rewrite Zoning Regulations.** Banning new billboards prevents the problem from getting worse, but it doesn't correct the existing situation. Some of the most troublesome aspects of existing billboards can be regulated (and in communities not implementing a full ban, features of new billboards can be restricted) by rewriting zoning laws. Regulations can:
 - Make all billboards "conditional", permitted only with public approval on a case-by-case basis.
 - Charge substantial annual permit fees per sign structure. Include stiff fines for failure to secure the permit - fines which can be waived in part if the offending billboard is removed.
 - Ban billboards completely from residential districts, historic districts, agricultural districts, neighborhood shopping districts, or downtown business districts.
 - Establish "setbacks" from residences, parks, schools, churches, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.
 - Set minimum distances between billboards on roads.
 - Limit size and height.
 - Restrict aspects such as illumination, billboards that impair any scenic vista, etc.
- **Remove Existing Billboards According to the New Policy.** (Perhaps according to a schedule). You can also set up a policy to **allow "exchanges,"** in which billboard companies may erect a new, "conforming" billboard if they remove one or more existing nonconforming billboards elsewhere.

Restricting the messages on billboard ads, (prohibiting only alcohol advertisements, for instance) is difficult. It is generally easier to ban or regulate billboards themselves rather than their content. For more details, write CSPI, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC, 20009-5728

Source: Images About Alcohol part of the FACE Initiative. Copyright 1997, Mid-State Substance Abuse Commission/FACE, Clare, MI. All rights reserved and may not be reprinted without permission.



Components of a Model Billboard Ordinance

No single ordinance will serve all communities, so each should be adapted to the character of individual communities. When it comes to billboards, many communities have concluded that *the best ordinance is one that bans all new billboards and requires the removal of existing ones.*

The following are recommended provisions of a model ordinance which allows some billboards.

- Billboards should be a “conditional” use, not a “permitted” use. No billboard should be permitted without holding a public hearing and without notifying all adjacent property owners.
- Billboards should be charged an *annual* permit fee of at least \$200 per sign structure.
- No company should be allowed to erect a new “conforming” billboard until it has removed an equal number or more of “nonconforming” billboards.
- No billboard should be permitted in any residential district, historic district, or agricultural district.
- No billboards should be permitted in any neighborhood shopping district or in the downtown commercial core.
- No billboard should be permitted on any designated scenic street, road, drive, parkway, or highway.
- No billboard should be permitted within 750 ft. of any residential district, historic district, park, school, church, hospital, retirement home, cemetery, convention center, or government building.
- No billboard should be permitted directly on or mounted above the roofs of buildings.
- No billboard should be permitted at any bridge crossing or situated to impair any scenic vista.
- No billboard should exceed 25 ft. in height or 300 sq. ft. in size.
- A minimum of 1,500 ft. should separate billboards on primary roads and a minimum of 1,000 ft. on secondary roads.
- Billboards shouldn’t be stacked over or put next to each other.
- No billboard within view of any residence should be illuminated.

Source: Edward T. McMahon and Patricia A. Taylor, Citizens’ Action Handbook on Alcohol and Tobacco Billboard Advertising.



SAMPLE PROPOSED ORDINANCE

Prohibiting Outdoor Alcohol Advertising

Whereas, it is illegal for any person under the age of twenty-one (21) years to obtain, possess, or control alcoholic beverages in the State of Minnesota, and Section 340A.503 of the Minnesota Code [change to fit your state] prohibits the sale or furnishing of any alcoholic beverage to a person under twenty-one (21) years of age; and

Whereas, alcoholic beverages are the second most heavily advertised products in America (after cigarettes), and the alcoholic beverages industry spends more than \$ 100 million annually for outdoor advertising of its products; and

Whereas, outdoor advertisements are a unique and distinguishable medium of advertising which subjects the general public to involuntary and unavoidable forms of solicitation, as the Supreme Court recognized in *Packer Corporation v. Utah*, 285 U.S. 105 (1932); and

Whereas, the Supreme Court and other federal courts have recognized the positive relationship between advertising and consumption; and

Whereas, in addition to judicial recognition of the link between advertising and consumption, empirical studies have shown that alcohol advertising increases consumption of alcohol, including consumption of alcohol by minors; and

Whereas, an ordinance restricting the placement of advertisements for alcoholic beverages in publicly visible locations within the City of _____ is necessary for the promotion of the welfare and temperance of minors exposed to such advertisements; and

Whereas, the City Council of _____ has chosen to exercise its police power under the Minnesota Constitution, and enact the following ordinance:

Section 1. Sign Regulations.

- Alcoholic beverage advertisements. No person may place any sign, poster, placard, device, graphic display, or any other form of advertising that advertises alcoholic beverages in publicly visible locations. In this section “publicly visible locations” includes outdoor billboards, sides of buildings, and freestanding signboards. This section shall not apply to:
 - The placement of signs, including advertisements:
 - inside licensed establishments; or
 - on commercial vehicles used for transporting alcoholic beverages
 - Any sign that contains the name or slogan of the licensed establishment that has been placed for the purpose of identifying the licensed establishment.

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- Any sign that contains a generic description of fermented malt beverages, wine or liquor, or any other generic description of alcoholic beverages;
- Any neon or electrically charged sign at a licensed establishment that is provided as part of a promotion of a particular brand of alcoholic beverage.

Section 2. Enforcement.

Any person who violates, disobeys, omits, neglects, or refuses to comply with, or resists the enforcement of any of the provisions of this ordinance shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and, upon conviction in any court of competent jurisdiction, shall be fined not less than fifty dollars (\$50) nor more than one hundred (\$ 100) dollars. It will constitute as a separate offense for each day these violations continue.

This ordinance shall take effect within ___ days.

Source: University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program, Local Ordinances.



SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE - ALCOHOL BILLBOARD ADVERTISING

NOTE: Send this release to the local news editor at your newspaper. Call the newspaper for the editor's name and for instructions on submitting the release.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact: [INSERT YOUR NAME AND PHONE NUMBER]

Community-Wide Survey Reveals Pervasive Alcohol Billboard Advertising

One local community group [OR INSERT NAME OF GROUP OR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO CONDUCTED THE SURVEY] has released the survey results of billboard advertising in the [NAME OF YOUR CITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD] area. This survey showed that total of (INSERT NUMBER) billboards currently exist in [NAME OF AREA OR NEIGHBORHOOD]. The group found that [INSERT NUMBER OF ALCOHOL BILLBOARDS] of the total billboards were used to advertise alcohol.

[YOU CAN ADAPT THE FOLLOWING QUOTE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER OR SPOKESPERSON - INCLUDE HIS OR HER NAME AND TITLE, IF APPLICABLE]

“We conducted this study in our neighborhood to help make everyone aware of the pervasiveness of alcohol billboards in our community. The problem with alcohol billboards is that they are constant; they are unavoidable and they reach everyone, regardless of their age. And, alcohol billboards generally detract from the overall visual atmosphere of our neighborhood.”

[ADAPT THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSION WITH YOUR GROUP'S INFORMATION AND FUTURE PLANS]

The group also revealed their plan to try to limit alcohol billboards, especially in the vicinity of schools, churches, and community centers. To find out more, contact [INSERT GROUP NAME].

Source: FACE Truth and Clarity on Alcohol.



SAMPLE OP-ED PIECE - ALCOHOL BILLBOARDS

NOTE: Contact a community leader and ask him or her to customize the following op-ed piece for submission to your local newspaper.

ISSUE: Alcohol Billboards In Our Community

I'm writing to express my support for a community group that is taking on a difficult but important issue that we need to address in [INSERT NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY] — alcohol billboard advertising.

Billboards are becoming more popular for alcohol advertisers, and they've steadily found their way into our own neighborhoods. What I find especially invasive about alcohol billboards is that they are unavoidable, and their messages glare down on all of us, regardless of age. Not to mention their overall impact on the visual atmosphere of our neighborhoods.

Many community groups around the country have battled this issue, and their experiences have proved that this will be a tough fight. However, I'm giving my whole-hearted support to a local community group that is willing to do what it takes to minimize billboard advertising right here in [INSERT NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD]. If you'd like to join us, please contact [INCLUDE YOUR GROUP NAME AND A PHONE NUMBER, IF APPLICABLE].

Sincerely,

Include name, title and group name, if applicable

Source: FACE Truth and Clarity on Alcohol.