

Alcohol Advertising

What are alcohol advertising restrictions and how do they work?

Restrictions on alcohol advertising include any policies that limit advertising of alcoholic beverages, particularly advertising that exposes young people to alcohol messages. Restrictions can be in the form of a local ordinance or state law, or can be implemented voluntarily by a business, event or organization and can include:

- Banning ads on buses, trains, kiosks, billboards and supermarket carts, and in bus shelters, schools and theme parks.
- Banning or limiting advertising and sponsorship at community events such as festivals, parties, rodeos, concerts and sporting events.¹
- Banning advertising in areas surrounding schools, residential areas, faith organizations, etc.²
- Restricting or banning TV and/or radio alcohol commercials.¹
- Restricting alcohol advertising in newspapers and/or on the Internet.
- Countering alcohol ads with public service announcements.¹
- Restricting the size and placement of window advertisements in liquor and convenience stores.²
- Requiring all alcohol ads in the local media to include warnings about the health risks of alcohol consumption.¹
- Setting a maximum for the percentage of total advertising space that alcohol ads can cover.
- Reducing the disproportionately high number of alcohol billboards in low-income neighborhoods.³
- Prohibit images and statements that portray or encourage intoxication.²
- Enforcing existing restrictions on alcohol advertising.

Source: University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program

References:

- 1 Sharp, W. Mad at the Ads: A Citizen's Guide to Challenging Alcohol Advertising Practices. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest. October, 1992.
- 2 Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth. State Alcohol Advertising Laws: Current Statutes and Model Policies. Georgetown University: Washington D.C. April 10, 2003.
- 3 Hackbarth DP, Silvestri B, Casper W. Tobacco and Alcohol Billboards in 50 Chicago Neighborhoods: Market Segmentation to Sell Dangerous Products to the Poor. Journal of Public Health Policy, 16(2):213-30, 1995.

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Why alcohol advertising restrictions are important for your community.

Alcohol advertisements often portray alcohol as enhancing economic success, fun, attractiveness to the opposite sex, athletic skill and social popularity.^{1, 2} Such messages are misleading and fail to mention the risks associated with alcohol use. Alcohol ad restrictions reduce the exposure to alcohol ads promoting unrealistic messages about alcohol use.

Parents can to some extent control their children's exposure to alcohol ads within their home but a large amount of advertising occurs in public spaces. Restrictions on alcohol advertising in public areas allows communities to have some control over young people's exposure to alcohol messages outside the home. Communities that restrict alcohol advertisers send a message to young people that underage alcohol use is not tolerated by the community. Restricting alcohol advertising in public places may help change community norms regarding alcohol use.

Source: University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program

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- 1 Sharp, W. Mad at the Ads: A Citizen's Guide to Challenging Alcohol Advertising Practices. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest. October, 1992.
- 2 Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth. State Alcohol Advertising Laws: Current Statutes and Model Policies. Georgetown University: Washington D.C. April 10, 2003.
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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.

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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: FACE — Resources, Training and Action on Alcohol Issues.

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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.