



## January 2018 Newsletter

### Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community: What does it mean for alcohol sales?

There is a lot of talk these days about “food deserts” where people don’t have sufficient access to healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables. Many of these are in low income areas. For example, the US Department of Agriculture states that 23 million people live in low-income areas that are more than a mile from a supermarket. Unfortunately, many of these same neighborhoods have ready access to alcohol, tobacco, and fast food.

Over the years, various problems have been identified with stores that sell alcohol. Some of these are:

1. **Products that appeal to youth and street drinkers:** High alcohol content products such as 90 proof liquor, 24 oz. tall cans (“black out in a can”), and cheap drinks favored by street drinkers. In some states, some of these products are banned in areas frequented by “public inebriates.”
2. **Advertising and promotion practices:** These include over-exposing youth to alcohol ads by placing promotions near toys or candy and inducing high volume sales by offering deep discounts or special coupons. Some states prohibit coupons or discounting for alcohol.
3. **Security issues:** Some stores are open after midnight with only one or two staff members. These can become targets for robberies. Advertising signs sometimes cover most of the front windows which shields the view of criminal activity inside the store. Some states and municipalities regulate the percentage of window space that can cover the view as well as lighting and staffing issues.



4. **Neighborhood nuisances such as litter, drug dealing in the area.** Regulations sometimes include the parking area as part of the licensed premises and require regular maintenance. Others use “good neighbor agreements” as a way for the licensee and community to work together on improvement measures.

#### So, what can be done to improve this situation?

California launched a program called Healthy Stores for Healthy Communities--a collaboration between health advocates in the fields of nutrition, tobacco control and alcohol abuse prevention. Information was gathered from more than seven thousand stores to document what products are sold and how they are promoted and advertised to influence purchases. California’s counties then worked on ways to make changes and used subsequent surveys to track changes.

An example is the Alameda County Public Health Department report “Food Access and Liquor Stores” made several recommendations including using zoning regulations to limit new fast food establishments in particularly over-saturated areas. The report recommended retaining the option to revoke the liquor license of any store where littering, drug dealing or other types of nuisances occur. Another recommendation was to offer financial assistance for converting liquor stores into other kinds of businesses that community members would like to have nearby.

Following on the data collected by the Healthy Stores for Healthy Communities, a non-profit called ChangeLab Solutions has come up with some interesting and useful strategies and materials for stakeholders trying to achieve healthy food availability. Because smaller stores are prevalent, and attracting larger grocery stores to underserved areas can be difficult, they came up with ways to encourage corner stores to offer healthier options. This includes in-store and exterior marketing and healthier options in the checkout area where a captive audience is often encouraged to make impulse purchases. This seems like a promising idea as sometimes small stores sell primarily alcohol and tobacco products, but could stock more healthy foods that can’t be obtained in the vicinity.

Cities and towns have tried different approaches to encourage healthier stores.

- incentivize stores to sell healthy products,
- use local ordinances to require stores to stock healthy foods
- prohibit stores from selling certain unhealthy products
- keep unhealthy products in locked areas or behind the counter where they can't be accessed by kids

Some retailers have voluntarily enacted some of these,



finding it positive for the community and the bottom line.

**And California isn't the only place that is trying innovative methods to improve the health in the retail environment.**

In an underserved area of Philadelphia, Brown's Grocery noted that 75,000 people didn't have a grocery store so they built one on the site of a shuttered Tastycakes factory.

Instead of being limited by the constraints of a bricks and mortar establishment, the founders of Fresh Truck converted a school bus into a fruit and vegetable shop in the model of a book-mobile to help get more fresh produce into the hands of kids and adults in underserved areas of Boston, MA.

In Marion County, Oregon, the health department has helped small shops offer more healthy alternatives. Many don't have the refrigeration needed to keep produce fresh so there is assistance with procuring this kind of equipment. Some produce delivery services won't deliver small orders and spoilage is always an issue. At the Come N Go Market, the owner was making strides in improving the quality of her store's offerings, and dealt with the situation of fruit ripening before it was sold by cutting it up and selling cups of fruit salad, which were

very popular.

A key element is a good working relationship among all community stakeholders. Alcohol regulators can help in curbing violations, but usually have no authority over what else is sold in the store. If the burden on our health system of preventable diseases is to be alleviated, stakeholders need to work together. Involving business leaders is also vital because they are likely to understand the financial difficulty of operating a small store in a low-income area.

Community leaders can view some of these resources and check out success stories of other communities.

**Sources:**

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Fresh Truck, <http://www.freshtruck.org/>

For more information, see [www.healthyalcoholmarket.com](http://www.healthyalcoholmarket.com)