

Happy Hour Restrictions

What are happy hour restrictions?

Promotions, such as happy hours, drinking contests, and “all-you-can-drink” specials, encourage overconsumption by reducing the cost of alcohol, with often tragic consequences. Happy hour restrictions are aimed at reducing these consequences by prohibiting any drink promotions, including happy hours.

Restrictions may prohibit:

- ▶ Reduced pricing during specific days or times;
- ▶ Free beverages;
- ▶ Additional servings;
- ▶ Unlimited beverages at a set price and time;
- ▶ Increased drink volume; and
- ▶ Drinks as prizes.

How do happy hour restrictions reduce underage drinking and its consequences?

Alcohol promotions encourage underage drinking by making alcohol more affordable and appealing. This—in turn—may encourage young people to engage in other illegal actions, such as driving under the influence. A Harvard School of Public Health’s College Alcohol Study demonstrated a

significant correlation between lower drink prices and higher binge drinking rates among 119 colleges across the United States. This same study demonstrated a reduction in self-reported drinking and driving rates when laws limited underage access to alcohol and even greater reductions when these laws were actively enforced.

How can my community take this action?

Take the following steps to initiate or strengthen happy hour restrictions:

Determine whether your State and community have any type of restrictions on happy hours or alcohol promotions. If few or no restrictions exist, mobilize community members around getting more restrictions passed. This effort could target the city, county, or State level. Provide a ready-made happy hour restrictions law for policymakers (see “Resources Supporting Action” for a link to sample State policies). If a comprehensive happy hour restriction is in place, assess how well it is being enforced.

Raise public awareness. Help the community and local leadership understand the link between happy hours and increased alcohol problems, such as alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes and fatalities.

Enlist the critical support of law enforcement. Restrictions are placed on at least one type of happy hour or similar type of promotions in many States; however, the 2005 report *Preventing Over-consumption of Alcohol—Sales to the Intoxicated and “Happy Hour” (Drink Special) Laws* (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2005), found that enforcement of restrictions is low.

Measure and report successful outcomes. Build public support for sustained happy hour restrictions by charting their effectiveness. Potential outcomes may be reductions in:

- ▶ Rates of driving under the influence;
- ▶ Rates of alcohol-related crime;
- ▶ Motor vehicle crashes;
- ▶ Alcohol-related injuries; and
- ▶ Youth fatalities in motor vehicle crashes.

Resources Supporting Action

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit*, from http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf (accessed January 31, 2012).

Sample State policies on happy hours and drink specials are available from <http://www.udetc.org/documents/HappyHoursDrinkSpecialsPolicies.pdf> (accessed January 31, 2012).

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Focus on Prevention*, from <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA10-4120/SMA10-4120.pdf> (accessed January 31, 2012).