



NEWSLETTER

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Why Do More Alcohol Outlets Lead to Greater Alcohol Problems?

It is very important for state and local communities to retain control over the number of alcohol outlets. It does make a difference. Every year there are more studies on this topic. In February, two Indiana University professors reported on their analysis of crime and outlet density in Cincinnati. They found that off-premise outlets were responsible for one in four simple assaults and one in three aggravated assaults. In another study of eight college communities, E. R. Weitzman and her team from the Harvard School of Public Health found that density was correlated with heavy drinking, frequent

But why? Cheap alcohol may be partly to blame. Here is a theory posed by researcher Paul Gruenewald, "As alcohol markets mature, the number of outlets increases to meet demand and eventually the market becomes saturated. At this point new outlets can compete only if they replace old outlets or find a way to increase demand." Outlets use different ways to increase demand. Stores will use temporary price reductions to bring in customers. Bars use drink promotions or draw customers with live entertainment. Some



drinking, and drinking related problems, particularly among women, underage students, and students who picked up drinking in college.



convenience stores stock cheap, high alcohol content products that attract street drinkers. Small wine

shops draw in wealthy customers who buy fine wine. Some of these sales strategies lead to greater social problems. This argues for a good balance of outlets in a neighborhood.

How many outlets are too many?

Good question! No one has come up with a precise formula. We just don't know enough about the market and social dynamics. However, the public health balance is best struck by local decision-makers, not large corporate interests that seek a "free market" for alcohol in our communities. What local groups have done is to map crime incidents and locations of licenses to identify problem areas. These are the areas where caution is needed when considering new licenses. This is particularly the case for the types of licenses that generate the most police calls, i.e. places where alcohol constitutes the majority of sales. Prevention advocates should also remember that alcohol policy must be comprehensive and not rely on single measures. As the World Health Organization recommends, policies need to address price, promotion practices, availability, age restriction and impaired driving.

Here are some helpful resources for the issue of outlet density:

"Alcohol Outlet Density and Public Health," Marin Institute, www.MarinInstitute.org.

"Fact Sheet: Alcohol Outlet Density," Alcohol Issues Committee, Capitol Neighborhood, Inc., Madison, Wisconsin.

"More Alcohol Sales Sites Mean More Neighborhood Violence, New Research Finds," Science Daily, February 22, 2010.

"How Alcohol Outlets Affect Neighborhood Violence," Kathryn Steward, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

"The relationship of alcohol outlet density to heavy and frequent drink and drinking-related problems among college students at eight universities," E.R. Weitzman, et al, Harvard School of Public Health, Health and Place, www.elsevier.com.

"What are the most effective and cost-effective interventions in alcohol control?" World Health Organization, February 2004.

"Why do alcohol outlets matter anyway: A look into the future," Paul Gruenewald, Prevention Resource Center, Berkeley CA, Editorial, Addiction, 2008.