



December 2022 Newsletter

The Critical Community Voice

By Pamela Erickson

How important is mobilizing the community voices when there is a problem with alcohol? It can be critical! In fact, it is unlikely that change will happen without the public saying there is a problem and we want a solution. A retired public health advocate expressed that sentiment in an on-line interview by the Responsible Hospitality Institute in celebration of their 40 years of working on these and other issues.

Today we are facing increased consumption by adults and impairment crashes. In an article reporting on survey research during COVID, the authors noted that “nearly two-thirds of the participants reported that their drinking had increased compared to their consumption rates prior to COVID-19. Reasons for this increase were increased stress, increased alcohol availability, and boredom.”

In my [July newsletter](#), I featured data from the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) showing the increase in traffic crashes. They now have published their estimate for part of 2022. They state, “NHTSA estimates that 9,560 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes in the first quarter of 2022. This is an increase of about 7% as compared to the 8,935 fatalities projected for the same quarter in 2021. This would be the highest number of first-quarter fatalities since 2002.”

I live in the Las Vegas area and impaired driving crashes continue unabated. These crashes happen at all times of the day or night as there are no state-mandated closing hours in Nevada. In fact, children and parents need to be wary of impaired drivers when they are going to school. Most recently there were two toddlers killed in a one-car drunk driving case. They were not in car seats; only adult seat belts. Almost every day there is a news article about someone killed in an impaired driving crash.

Clearly, we have a community problem across the nation. What we need now is community voices. The solution is not simple. Florida cities are considering earlier closing hours. While that might help, it is not a silver bullet. What is needed is a “full court press” which means that a comprehensive approach will get the best result as long as it comes with consistent community voices. So, these are recommended steps:

1. Mobilize community members, document problems and prepare simple summaries for public officials.
2. Engage with members of the hospitality community. This may consist of licensees, but also may include a hospitality committee or visitors' bureau. As a former regulator I know that not all liquor licensees are problems, but it's important that most licensees understand that over-service is not a good business practice. I have become convinced that conversations between community and industry members is important.
3. Understand that while it may take time, community efforts to limit problems does work. Just look at how work to reduce underage drinking resulted in dramatically lower drinking rates for young people! And, the efforts of MADD have dramatically reduced drunk driving over the last few decades.
4. Analyze problems. Please make sure you develop a way to get regular information as this is a rapidly changing world. Today you not only have increased consumption, but alcohol is everywhere. Soft drink companies are making alcohol products, there are sales over the internet, and many states now allow home delivery of alcohol. You may get a lot of help from state and local law enforcement and public health. They know about problems with alcohol such as excess consumption and impaired driving. What measures do they recommend?

For more information, see www.healthyalcoholmarket.com

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5. Develop a comprehensive set of measures designed to curb problems in your community. There are helpful resources available. For example, the book “Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity” has a table that lists strategies according to efficacy (according to research) and costs.
6. Engage with policy-makers. These may be local mayors, city council people, or state legislators. It helps to have a champion who is also a policy maker!
7. Share your work with colleagues and friends and share this newsletter. Get acquainted with resources such as the [Center for Alcohol Policy](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control](#). And, there are many other excellent resources.

Finally, I wish all of my readers great success in dealing with these critical issues in 2023.

Sources:

[Responsible Hospitality Institute](#), “RHI Celebrates 40 Years with Linda Majors and Jim Mosher. Sent on-line interviews on December 13, 2022.

[“Alcohol Consumption during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Cross-Sectional Survey of US Adults,”](#) by Elyse R. Grossman, Sara E. Benjamin-Neelon, and Susan Sonnenschein, Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2020 Dec; 17(24): 9189. Published online 2020 Dec 9.

[“NHTSA Early Estimates Show Record Increase in Fatalities Nationwide”](#), August 17, 2022

[“Witnesses recount crash that killed two toddlers.”](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal

[Drunk Driving Deaths Increase by 14%](#), July 2022
Newsletter for [HealthyAlcoholMarketplace.com](#)

[“Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity,”](#) Third Edition, Thomas F. Babor, Sally Casswell, Kathryn Graham, Taisia Huckle, Michael Livingston, Esa Österberg, Jürgen Rehm, Robin Room, Ingeborg Rossow, and Bundit Sornpaisarn.