

Coalition for the Prevention of Alcohol Problems

1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009-5728

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DON'T SWALLOW BIG BEER'S FOAM ON UNDERAGE DRINKING

Dear Senator/Congressmember:

In early September, the National Academy of Sciences will deliver a landmark report to Congress on "A National Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking." This report will provide the first-ever attempt to formulate a cohesive, coherent, science-based national strategy to combat underage drinking, the nation's number one youth drug problem.

Even before the report's release, the National Beer Wholesalers Association (NBWA) has begun lobbying Congress to undermine its credibility and importance. The beer industry wants you to believe that it knows better than public health experts how to fight underage drinking, and even claims that its own "prevention" programs contributed to two decades of progress in reducing the tragic toll that underage drinking takes on society. However, the reality is more sobering:

- Beer is the number one drug of choice for children and teens and kills six times more youth than all illicit drugs combined. Alcohol – primarily beer – is linked to the top three causes of teen death (traffic crashes, murder, and suicide), and underage alcohol use costs Americans some \$58 billion annually.
- Research suggests that underage drinking accounts for up to 20% of all alcohol consumption in the United States. Approximately 11 million American youth under the age of 21 drink alcohol, nearly half of them drink heavily (downing five or more per occasion). An estimated 3 million teenagers are full blown alcoholics, and several million more have a serious drinking problem.
- Kids are beginning to drink at younger ages today. The average age when children have their first drink is now 11 years for boys and 13 for girls. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the younger a child begins to drink the greater his or her likelihood of becoming a heavy or addicted drinker.
- Underage drinking spawns the future heavy and addicted drinking on which the beer market so heavily depends. The top 20% of beer drinkers account for 80% of beer consumption and sales.
- Brewers' commitment to "responsibility" programs pales in comparison to the billions they spend enticing consumers – young and old – to drink. Sexy, glitzy, funny, hip and memorable beer ads – many of them aired on youths' favorite TV shows – provide a primary and extremely powerful source of "education" for young people about alcohol.

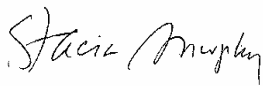
Don't be fooled by the beer industry's self-serving propaganda. Underage drinking is one of the costliest and most neglected health crises for America's youth. The alcoholic-beverage industry has an undeniable responsibility to help prevent the misuse of its products. However, just as tobacco companies

shouldn't have primary responsibility for youth smoking prevention, neither should vested interests in the alcoholic-beverage industry have the last -- or loudest -- word when it comes to preventing underage drinking.

The time has come to end decades of complacency about one of the most devastating and neglected public health problems facing young people and society. We urge you to closely review and act on the NAS's long-overdue roadmap for tackling the nation's number one youth drug problem.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Stacia Murphy
President
National Council on Alcohol and
Drug Dependence



George A. Hacker
Director
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Center for Science on the Public Interest

On behalf of:

American Public Health Association
Consumer Federation of America
Council on Substance Abuse-NCADD (Montgomery, AL)
Dads and Daughters
FACE - Truth and Clarity on Alcohol
Indiana University Alcohol and Drug Information Center (Bloomington, IN)
Institute for Public Strategies (San Diego, CA)
Maine Association of Prevention Programs
The Marin Institute (San Rafael, CA)
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Latino Council on Alcohol and Tobacco Prevention
North Coastal Prevention Coalition (San Diego County, CA)
Ohio Parents for Drug-Free Youth
Pennsylvania Independent State Store Union
The Honorable William Hathaway, former U.S. Senator
The Trauma Foundation
Salvation Army
United Methodist Church General Board on Church and Society