

Out-of-Home Alcohol Advertising



The Problem

Everyone, regardless of age, is exposed to out-of-home alcohol advertisements, almost as soon as they walk out the door. The connection between youth exposure to alcohol ads and underage drinking is well documented. The more ads kids see, the more likely they are to drink,¹ start drinking at an earlier age, drink more,² and experience alcohol-related problems.³

Out-of-home ads are not only traditional billboards and signs located outside. Out-of-home advertising includes various types of promotions located both outdoors (such as bus benches, kiosks, and vehicles such as buses and trucks), as well as inside (including video networks in subways and grocery stores, commercials before movies, and digital ads in airports, malls, and bars).

- In 2012, advertisers spent \$6.7 billion on out-of-home advertising, a 22% growth over the last decade.⁴
- Historically, the alcohol industry has been one of the largest purchasers of outdoor advertising.⁵
- Advertisers have increasingly recognized that outdoor advertisements deliver a mass audience and reach consumers who are not exposed to newspapers or television news.⁶
- Transit advertising is a particularly attractive medium. Research from New York City describes transit passengers as a captive audience; ads take advantage of the proximity to other riders:
*Participants in focus groups in New York City said they welcome advertising in subway cars because the advertisements help them avoid uncomfortable eye contact with other riders and provide something to look at during trips.*⁶
- A study that examined out-of-home alcohol advertisements in ten U.S. cities found that alcohol ads in inner-city neighborhoods, were most prevalent on billboards, often featured beer products, and marketed the quality of the products.⁷
- One study in Central Harlem, New York, found many ads near schools, churches, and playgrounds. The authors concluded “predominantly Black neighborhoods continue to face high exposure to outdoor alcohol advertising, including around sites at which youth congregate.”⁸
- Researchers found that 25% of outdoor advertising in Central Harlem was dedicated to promoting alcohol. Exposure to this advertising increased black women’s chances of being a problem drinker by 13%.⁹
- In Boston, researchers found that alcohol ads reached the equivalent of every adult in the Greater Boston region, and every 5th- to 12th-grade public school student, each day. More alcohol ads were displayed in public transit stations in neighborhoods with high poverty rates than in stations in neighborhoods with low poverty rates.¹⁰
- A study of alcohol ads near Chicago schools found that “exposure to outdoor alcohol advertising around schools is associated with subsequent youth intentions to use alcohol” even among sixth-grade nonusers of alcohol.¹¹
- Most major U.S. transit authorities currently ban alcohol advertising on public transit, yet city-controlled transit furniture (bus benches, kiosks, etc.) are often not included in those bans.¹²
- Though many metropolitan transit agencies have policies banning alcohol advertisements, some agencies have backtracked on their commitment to public health and safety. Yet the public money spent by any urban center to mitigate alcohol-related harm (e.g. medical, hospital, and emergency services; law enforcement; legal services; rehabilitation, treatment, and prevention services), far outweighs any potential revenue from alcohol advertising.

- Local and state governments can enact laws and policies to reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising on billboards and other out-of-home media. Advertising restrictions are associated with decreased consumption: After five years, a full ban on billboard advertising was associated with an estimated 3.8% lower spirit consumption.¹³

Bottom Line

Out-of-home alcohol advertising may be high-tech, but it's not inevitable or acceptable. Communities can hold the alcohol industry accountable and enact, strengthen, and enforce policies that prevent youth overexposure to alcohol advertising.

References

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