



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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With support from the OJJDP Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative, community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens are working collaboratively to change local ordinances and enforcement practices.

Alaskans Win Increase in Excise Tax

Alaska recently increased the excise tax on alcohol, the first such increase in 19 years. The effort, spearheaded by the "Dime a Drink" coalition, is an important step in prevention in the State.

Alaska ranks near the top of the nation in alcohol consumption and underage drinking, with 24% of the population bingeing. Alaska's rate of alcohol dependence is twice the national average, and they have the highest incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome in the country. Alcohol is also involved in a large share of domestic violence incidents, driving fatalities, and chronic child abuse cases in the State. Alaska pays about \$453 million a year to respond to these problems but only collects about \$12 million in alcohol excise taxes.

Efforts to increase the alcohol tax (sales and excise) had been championed in the 1990s, unsuccessfully. For the next attempt, the "Dime a Drink" coalition-- led by a key legislator, the Alaskan Public Health Association, and the Alaskan Mental Health Trust-- consolidated years of local research to cement political support. The coalition attracted some uncommon partners: public and private, conservative and liberal, Republican and Democrat, native and nonnative. No single group could have influenced this public policy change, and numerous State and local research publications and public polls documented support for an alcohol tax increase by a 3-to-1 margin.

Youth participation was a key component in the campaign, too. Members of MADD's "Youth in Action" helped convince legislators that increased alcohol taxes could discourage underage drinking. They argued that teenagers who drink early can become adult dependent drinkers who drink and drive.

Opponents argued that Alaska had one of the highest taxation rates in the nation. However, Alaska had the lowest alcohol tax rates

after general sales taxes, special alcohol sales taxes, and on-premise taxes were compared to the rates in other States. Furthermore, the excise tax had not been increased since 1983.

>Our Point:
Communities, States, and law enforcement are successfully changing laws, regulations, and enforcement practices to reduce underage drinking.

Of significant consideration in the debate was the \$1 billion budget deficit that Alaska faced. This stark reality, coupled with a broad base of public support, helped to convince the Legislature and the Governor to support the alcohol tax increase, so that all alcohol is taxed at \$0.10 per drink. Though the increase would not offset the estimate \$453 million spent annually on alcohol-related problems, it would help fill the gap. Of course, increased taxation is not the sole answer to the alcohol-related problems in Alaska. It is just one part of a comprehensive plan to reduce consumption and prevent related problems. Nonetheless, the \$30 million in additional revenue will help pay for sorely needed public services.

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