

The San Diego County Poll on Alcohol Promotions and Youth

From the San Diego Alcohol Survey (2001) • Presented in March, 2002

San Diegans consider drinking by youth under 21 to be a serious local problem, and they believe that the promotional practices of the alcohol industry contribute to underage and excessive drinking, according to a comprehensive telephone survey commissioned by the nonprofit Institute for Public Strategies (IPS).

The poll was designed to gauge both public opinion on alcohol issues in San Diego and public support for some of the County's initiatives to prevent alcohol-related problems. The survey results in this fact sheet pertain to a set of questions about underage drinking and the promotional efforts of the alcohol industry.

Methodology

The poll of 750 county residents 18 years of age and older was conducted randomly by the Washington, D.C.-based firm of Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates between Dec. 1 and 9, 2001. The results are representative by ethnicity, age, gender, income and geography. Residents had the option to conduct the interview in English or Spanish. The survey sample's margin of error is +/- 3.5%. IPS commissioned the poll under contract with the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Alcohol and Drug Services.

Summary of Findings

Residents of San Diego County overwhelmingly consider underage drinking to be a serious problem. San Diegans believe that the alcohol industry influences youth to drink, and to drink excessively, through its promotions. They also believe that the alcohol industry influences specific other groups to drink, like minorities and lower-income residents, and that the "responsibility" message of alcohol producers is mainly intended to improve their image and promote themselves as good corporate citizens. Finally, San

Diegans do not think politicians should accept donations from the alcohol industry, and they believe such contributions affect how politicians vote.

CONCERN ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING

- More than 6 out of 7 residents of San Diego County (86%) say underage drinking in the region is a *serious concern*, and a majority (55%) consider it to be a *very serious problem*.

PERCEIVED GOALS OF ALCOHOL PROMOTIONS

- Most San Diegans do not believe that the alcohol industry promotes its products only to those of legal age. By a nearly 3-to-1 margin, residents say that beer and liquor companies advertise to youth under 21 as well as adults (70%) rather than to adults only (26%).
- Of those who think underage drinkers are targeted by beer and liquor companies, nearly 8 out of 10 residents believe that it is on purpose (77%) and not by accident (16%).
- More than 4 out of 5 residents (83%) agree that the alcohol industry's ads use *sexy women* to draw people to their products.
- More than 7 out of 10 residents (73%) agree that beer and liquor companies target underage *college students* with their ads.

- Nearly 4 out of 5 residents (78%) agree that the industry places promotions at *sports events* to attract a young, male audience.

PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL PROMOTIONS

- 7 out of 10 residents (70%) say advertising, marketing and promotions by the alcohol industry influence people under the age of 21 to drink, and almost 9 in 10 (87%) think those practices are a factor in influencing young people to try alcohol.
- More than 4 out of 5 residents (82%) agree that advertising that associates drinking with *fun, sex, glamour and social acceptance* entices young people to drink alcohol.
- More than 7 out of 10 residents (74%) agree that alcohol company sponsorship of *sports and musical events at colleges* encourages young people to drink.
- More than 7 out of 10 residents (72%) say advertising, marketing and promotions by the alcohol industry are a factor in influencing young people under the age of 21 to drink *excessively*. And about 1 in 3 residents (32%) say those practices are a *major* factor.
- Among the alcohol industry practices that San Diegans say contribute to *excessive* underage drinking are *spring break promotions* (47%), *advertising that glamorizes* alcohol use (45%), sponsorship of *college-related events* (39%) and ads with *sexual themes* (38%).

TARGETING OTHER SPECIFIC GROUPS

- More than 7 out of 10 San Diegans (73%) say the alcohol industry targets specific groups other than underage youth with its ads. Specific groups that receive the most mention include *people living in poorer neighborhoods* (37%) and *minorities* (35%).

- 2 out of 3 residents (66%) believe that these specific groups are negatively affected or harmed by being targeted by the alcohol industry.

THE INDUSTRY'S PERCEIVED MOTIVES

- More than 7 out of 10 residents (72%) agree that the "responsibility" message of alcohol producers is intended to improve their image and promote themselves as good corporate citizens.
- Nearly 7 in 10 San Diegans (69%) agree that when beer companies talk about "responsible drinking," they're "just trying to avoid getting sued like the tobacco companies."
- More than 6 out of 10 San Diegans (61%) agree that beer and liquor companies talk about "individual responsibility" because they want Americans to overlook the role they play in encouraging young people to drink.

ALCOHOL DOLLARS AND POLITICS

- Almost 7 in 10 residents of San Diego (68%) think it is inappropriate for politicians to accept donations from the alcohol industry.
- 7 out of 10 San Diegans (70%) think contributions from the alcohol industry affect the way politicians vote.



A nonprofit organization with local and national projects advancing public health through changes in policy and community norms, the Institute for Public Strategies has offices in San Diego and Ventura, California; Bozeman, Montana; and Tijuana, Mexico. For more information about the San Diego Alcohol Survey and related topics, call (619) 474-8844 or e-mail info@publicstrategies.org. A copy of this fact sheet can be downloaded online at www.publicstrategies.org.

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