## Where can I get more information?

### Training Guidance

The Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center produced its *Guide to Responsible Alcohol Sales: Off-Premise Clerk, Licensee, and Manager Training* to assist alcohol establishment licensees educate and train their personnel. The guide contains tools (for example, curricula and assessments) for use when training clerks and manager to check identification (ID); recognize false or altered IDs; appropriately refuse sales; handle difficult situations that may arise; and develop skills needed to refuse sales to minors. Another important feature of the guide is that it focuses on outlet policy and helps licensees and managers develop and implement effective store policies to reduce sales to minors. The guide is available online at the Center's website, **www.udetc.org**.

### State Resources

Because State laws differ with regard to training requirements, one of the most practical steps for learning more about merchant education is to contact the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) office in your State. Some States sponsor specific programs. Other States can provide lists of approved training programs and contact information. The National Liquor Law Enforcement Association maintains a website on which contact information for most States ABC offices are listed (**http://www.nllea.org/state.asp**).

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OJJDP Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center

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# Preventing Sales of Alcohol to Minors:

## What You Should Know About Merchant Education Programs

OJJDP Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center

# What are **merchant education programs?**

Education and training of merchants and servers who sell alcohol are intended to promote voluntary compliance with laws and regulations governing the sale of alcohol to minors. Education programs can be provided both for off-sales outlets (such as liquor or grocery stores) and on-sales outlets (such as bars and restaurants). These programs may also be conducted as part of a more general approach to responsible beverage service training. Educational approaches can take a variety of forms, including:

- ★ Distribution of materials to alcohol retailers summarizing the laws and penalties regarding sales to minors;
- ★ Visits to retailers by representatives of regulatory or enforcement agencies or by community groups concerned about sales to minors;
- ★ Training programs offered to managers and employees; and
- ★ Mandatory education programs for establishments or employees in violation of youth access laws.

## What can merchant education do?

Merchant education can serve a variety of purposes, including:

- **Provide information** about laws and penalties that might help merchants to understand the risks they take when they sell to minors;
- **Persuade** merchants that selling to minors is dangerous and violates not just the law but the norms of the community;
- Help owners and managers **establish responsible management policies**; and
- **Teach skills**—such as how to recognize a false ID— that can help prevent sales to minors.

## How effective is merchant education in reducing underage alcohol sales?

Merchant education should be conducted *only* as part of a comprehensive and integrated enforcement effort. Enforcement of laws against sales to minors is the key to reducing underage sales. Well-publicized, vigorous use of compliance checks has been repeatedly shown to reduce sales to minors. Merchant education programs can help to generate public and business support for enforcement and can enhance enforcement efforts. They have *not* been shown to be powerful interventions on their own.

Communities interested in merchant education programs as part of their strategic plan to reduce underage drinking should check with their State Liquor Control Agency. In many cases they can provide the training and/or curriculum for merchant education programs as well as advise community groups about the State laws that exist in the state regarding merchant liability and related issues. Involving your local enforcement agencies and district attorney in your planning can also help ensure that compliance is reinforced.

## What are responsible beverage service programs?

Responsible beverage service is one type of merchant education program, generally implemented in bars, restaurants, and other on-sales alcohol outlets. These programs provide overall instruction in safe and responsible beverage service and sales. Considerable research demonstrates that a well-implemented, responsible beverage service program can be effective in reducing the sale of alcohol to intoxicated persons and in preventing impaired driving. However, little research currently exists to indicate whether these programs can be effective in reducing the sale of alcohol to minors. In general, we can assume that responsible beverage service or other merchant education programs can be a useful component of an overall enforcement effort.

## What components should a merchant education program include?

Educational programs for merchants should include the following elements:

- Information about laws and penalties;
- Information indicating the importance of avoiding sales to minors to protect the health and well-being of everyone in the community;
- An emphasis on proper management techniques and policies to encourage compliance with the law;
- Information about how to recognize false IDs; and
- Tips on how to refuse a sale safely and comfortably.

Perhaps the most important component—and one that unfortunately is often neglected—is the emphasis on proper management techniques. Clerks and others who carry out direct sales to customers may have difficulty adhering to the law *unless* they have appropriate management support.

## How does merchant education fit within a larger community effort?

Educating alcohol merchants can be a community effort that goes beyond any specific training program or distribution of materials. Some community groups visit merchants and talk to them about the importance of avoiding the sale of alcohol to minors. Sometimes young people make these visits themselves, asking merchants to help protect them and their peers. Some communities reward merchants who refuse to sell alcohol to minors with small prizes or by sending and publishing letters of commendation.

**Merchants need more than just the facts about the law. They need to feel that the community supports them in their efforts to do the right thing.**