

Executive Summary Report
Cobb Youth Teams' Environmental Scan – 2004

This report summarizes findings from recent environmental scans of Cobb County businesses licensed to sell alcohol and/or tobacco products. The scans were conducted by (15) teams of youth and adult advisors in (166) randomly selected retail establishments located throughout Cobb County, in the winter of 2004. Youth teams collected observational data from each establishment and surveyed employees to assess local alcohol and tobacco sales practices. The project was developed as part of the Cobb Underage Drinking Task Forces' youth advocacy initiative, in partnership with area merchants. It was designed to help reduce youth commercial access to tobacco and alcohol, and limit merchants' risk and liability for illegal tobacco and alcohol sales.

Types of business outlets visited:

62 - Restaurants	14 - Drug Stores
47 - Convenience Stores	14 - Package or Liquor Stores
25 - Grocery Stores	4 - Other

Highlights from the findings include:

- A majority (90%) of survey respondents said their company or store had a “written” policy about alcohol and tobacco sales. However few (3%) of the establishments visited used signage to display the commercial alcohol policy best practice for age verification; “ID check everyone” or “ID check customers under age 40”.
- A majority (84%) of survey respondents said their company or store checks up on employees to make sure they don't sell alcohol or tobacco to underage customers. Use of rewards and consequences for employee compliance, another commercial alcohol policy best practice, was not reported.
- A majority (78%) of survey respondents said they had alcohol and tobacco sales training for their job. About one-quarter (22%) said they had no training. Only one-third of those trained said their training included a written test. Few (10%) reported use of commercial alcohol policy best practice “classroom-based” training method.

Additional findings include:

- Of the survey respondents reporting they received some kind of training; most (83%) reported “video-based” or “discussion with a manager” as training methods used. *Studies have found these methods have little impact on employee behavior.*
- Reported observations collected from *three different establishments*: youth teams witnessed sale of alcohol and/or tobacco to a customer *appearing to be underage*, without employee asking for and checking ID in order to verify customer's legal age.
- A majority (82%) of survey respondents indicated underage use of tobacco and alcohol in Cobb County was “very serious” or “somewhat serious”. About half of the survey respondents indicated they had experienced underage persons trying to buy alcohol or tobacco.

- A majority of survey respondents (96%) indicated 21 as the legal age for alcohol sales, and (83%) indicated 18 as the legal age for tobacco sales. However, some employee responses indicated they did not know the correct legal age of sale for alcohol and/or tobacco.
- Survey respondents indicated their ability to determine a customer's age by their appearance: 66% said "no" they could not tell if a customer was old enough to buy alcohol or tobacco by their appearance, 21% said "yes" they could tell, and 13% said they "don't know" if they could tell.
- Survey respondents indicated time-on-the-job: 68% reported being on-the-job 1 year or less, 22% reported being on-the-job 2-5 years, and 10% reported being on-the-job 6 years or more.
- Survey respondents reported their age-ranges: 57% reported they were 26 years old or older, 30% reported they were 21-25 years old, and 13% reported they were 15-20 years old.

Summary and conclusions:

It is clear that youth and merchants' employees alike believe youth access to tobacco and alcohol to be serious problems in Cobb County. Commercial alcohol and tobacco sales practices vary considerably among all types of business outlets in Cobb County. A shared understanding of the benefits of commercial alcohol policy best practices would help merchant and youth interests. If more business establishments implemented comprehensive alcohol and tobacco compliance programs, using commercial alcohol policy best practices, both youth and merchants could reach their goals: reducing youths' access to age restricted products and, limiting merchants' risk and liability for illegal sales of alcohol and tobacco. Reported project findings can provide a good foundation and direction for future actions.

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Share project summary report findings and commercial alcohol policy best practices broadly with all area businesses, taskforce partners and local elected officials.
2. Encourage manager attendance at Policy Workshop for Responsible Alcohol and Tobacco Sales and Service.
3. Implement media advocacy campaign for commercial alcohol and tobacco sales best practices.



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