

News Release

For Immediate Release

December 17, 2002

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Youth See More TV Commercials for Beer than for Sneakers, Gum or Jeans

Former FDA Commissioner Kessler calls for real reforms of alcohol marketing practices

Washington, DC - One quarter of alcohol advertising on television in 2001 was more likely to be seen by youth than adults, according to [a report released today](#) by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University, a public health group established to monitor and analyze the industry's marketing and its impact on youth.

The report by the Center analyzed alcohol advertising on cable and network television in 2001. Of 208,909 alcohol commercials on television in 2001, underage youth, ages 12 to 20, were more likely than adults of legal drinking age to have seen 51,084 of them, or 24.5%.

In addition, the Center concluded that the alcohol industry's voluntary guidelines for ad placements on television allow for the substantial exposure of youth to alcoholic beverage advertising. The published voluntary guidelines of the beer and distilled spirits industries call for member companies not to advertise on programs with a 50% or more youth audience. However, in 2001, only 1% of all network and cable television programs (187 out of the 14,359 tracked by Nielsen) had an underage audience of 50% or more - the industry threshold. Further, even this minimal 50% threshold was sometimes violated as alcohol advertisers spent \$1.8 million to air 3,262 commercials on shows with more youth viewers than adults. "This study shows that no one is protecting our youth. As a result, teenagers are seeing unbalanced and unrealistic messages about alcohol," said former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Dr. David A. Kessler who led the agency's investigation on tobacco companies' marketing to youth.

"The industry's own guidelines are so permissive that, in practice, they amount to no limits at all. It is like a promise not to drive faster than 125 miles per hour - that doesn't slow you down much," said Kessler, a pediatrician and currently dean of the Yale University School of Medicine.

Other key findings from the study include:

- **Youth saw more commercials for beer than for juice, gum, chips, sneakers or jeans.**
The beer and ale advertising delivered to the underage youth audience in 2001 was greater than advertising for various products normally associated with youth audiences. Beer and ale advertising exceeded the advertising delivered to youth audiences for fruit

juices and fruit-flavored drinks, gum, skin care products, sneakers, non-carbonated soft drinks, and jeans.

- **Youth saw almost as much television alcohol advertising as adults.** Even when adults were more likely to see television alcohol advertising than youth, in many instances youth exposure was substantial. For instance, youth saw two beer and ale ads in 2001 for every three seen by an adult. Furthermore, an estimated 30% of youth saw at least 780 alcohol commercials in 2001.
- **Alcohol ads on youth-oriented networks and programs overexpose youth.** Youth were routinely overexposed to alcohol advertising in 2001 on five networks - WB, UPN, Comedy Central, BET and VH-1. Two programming categories - music video and entertainment programs and variety shows - more effectively delivered alcohol advertising to the youth audience than to the adult audience. Youth saw 48% more advertising than adults on music video and entertainment programs. Variety programs delivered 26% more advertising to youth audiences than to adults.

"It is evident that the alcohol industry is not adequately monitoring its own advertising and that the current standards and practices fail to protect youth from overly aggressive alcohol marketing," said the Center's executive director Jim O'Hara.

The Center has submitted this report to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and asked for a new review of the companies' advertising practices. At the request of Congress, the FTC reviewed the alcohol industry's marketing practices in 1999 and called for improvements, specifically recommending as a "best practice" that alcohol companies not advertise on television programs where the audience was 30% or 25% underage.

"The alcohol industry should stop hiding behind its bogus 50% standard and the FTC should ask itself if its 'best practices' standard really protects the public health of our youth or just the economic health of the industry," O'Hara said.

Background on the report: The study analyzes \$811.2 million spent on alcohol product advertising on television during calendar year 2001, representing 208,909 advertisements that were placed on network, cable, and spot television. According to O'Hara, by "auditing" the actual alcohol advertising on television in 2001, this analysis sheds light on how much and how often youth were exposed to alcohol advertising on television. The study employs the same tools, data sources, and procedures that are utilized by media planners and buyers to carry out advertising campaigns. Audience and expenditure data for all of the advertising analyzed in this report is from Nielsen Media Research and Competitive Media Reporting.

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