

News Release

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Raised on Radio: Underage Youth More Likely to Hear Alcohol Ads on Radio Than Adults

Alcohol Industry Reforms Need Monitoring

Washington, DC - More than a quarter of radio ads for alcohol in the summer of 2003 would not have been in compliance with the alcohol industry's revised marketing codes announced in September 2003, a [new study](#) by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at Georgetown University finds.

The Center, working with Virtual Media Resources, an independent media planning and research firm, analyzed 51,883 airings of 106 different ads for beer, distilled spirits, wine and flavored malt beverages, commonly known as "alcopops." The ads aired in 104 markets across the country from June 15 to July 31, 2003. The analysis shows that 28% of these airings occurred when underage youth were more than 30% of the listening audience.

More specifically, the study shows that a number of brands placed a significant percentage of ads where underage youth constituted more than 30% of the listening audience. For instance, 52% of the Heineken radio ads, 42% of the Amstel Light radio ads, 42% of the Corona Extra radio ads and 35% of the Miller Lite radio ads aired when more than 30% of the listening audience was underage youth, 12-20.

In September 2003, the Beer Institute and the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) announced stricter guidelines for ad placement by their member companies. According to these revised industry marketing codes, underage youth should not constitute more than 30% - a change from 50% - of the audience for alcohol ads.

"The alcohol industry will have to reform its advertising practices on radio dramatically to comply with the new marketing code provisions," said David H. Jernigan, CAMY research director. "Even more importantly, these findings underscore the importance of tracking and monitoring these ads so parents and the rest of the public can be assured that these reforms are taking place," Jernigan said.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences released a major report in September 2003 outlining a national strategy to reduce

underage drinking. Among the recommendations for the federal government, the IOM called on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to monitor the advertising practices of the alcohol industry on a continuing basis and periodically report its findings to Congress and the public.

In the pending omnibus appropriations bill for FY 2004, Congress directs HHS to act on the IOM recommendations and report back within 90 days from passage on its plan to reduce underage drinking.

Summary of Findings

The Center's analysis of alcohol radio advertising during the summer of 2003 examined whether ads were placed above the industry's ad placement threshold and whether ads were more likely to be heard, on a per capita basis, by underage youth, 12-20, or by legal-age adults.

To analyze whether underage youth were more likely, on a per capita basis, to hear the alcohol ads on radio, the Center used a standard advertising industry measure of gross ratings points (GRPs). This provides for the population-weighting of exposure to advertising since there are always more adults than youth in a population.

In 14 of the 15 largest radio markets in the United States by population, underage youth were more likely, on a per capita basis, to hear the alcohol ads than adults over 21. In five of the 15 markets, namely Chicago, San Francisco, Houston-Galveston, Washington, D.C., and Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood, underage youth were more likely to hear the radio ads than young adults, ages 21-34.

The Center's analysis also found that four radio formats - urban contemporary, alternative, rhythmic contemporary hit, and pop contemporary hit - accounted for almost three-quarters of the underage youth exposure to alcohol advertising on radio.

Radio is a popular medium among America's youth. Over the course of a week, the average teenager listens to 13.5 hours of radio. By comparison, he or she spends 10.6 hours per week watching television, 7.6 hours online, and 3.3 hours reading magazines for pleasure. For advertisers, radio offers targeted selection of an audience, because station formats appeal to narrow demographics.

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