

News Release

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Contact:

info@camy.org

Alcohol Product Commercials Overwhelm "Responsibility" Messages From 2001 to 2003

Teens saw 779 television ads promoting alcohol, compared to 9 industry-funded ads warning against underage drinking; B-Roll With Ads Available

Washington, DC - Between 2001 and 2003, American teenagers saw, on average, 779 television commercials selling alcohol, but only nine alcohol company commercials discouraging underage drinking, according to [a report released today](#) by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at Georgetown University.

CAMY, which is supported by grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, compared the "responsibility" ads placed by the alcohol industry on television between 2001 and 2003 to televised alcohol product ads from the same time period. The comparison was done in terms of number, cost, placement on television programs, and audiences exposed. "Responsibility" ads have as their primary focus a message about drinking responsibly, not drinking and driving, or not drinking before the legal age of 21.

Between 2001 and 2003, 78% of underage youth between the ages of 12 and 20 saw television ads purchased by alcohol companies to discourage underage drinking. Yet, on average, they saw only nine of these ads over the entire three-year period.

In comparison, 91% of 12- to 20-year-olds saw an average of 779 product ads selling alcohol over the same time period. Alcohol company "responsibility" ads about drunk driving and safety fared slightly better than underage drinking ads, with 82% of youth seeing an average of 20 alcohol company ads about drinking safely or not drinking and driving. "The alcohol industry's warnings to our kids not to drink until they are 21 are buried under an avalanche of alcohol ads that glamorize drinking," said Dr. David Jernigan, CAMY research director. "This imbalance undermines the efforts of parents and teachers to warn our children against underage drinking."

Other key findings from the report include:

- Alcohol ads outnumbered industry "responsibility" ads by nearly 32 to 1. Between 2001 and 2003, alcohol companies placed 761,347 product ads on television, versus only 24,161 "responsibility" ads. On a year-by-year basis, the gap between product advertising and responsibility advertising widened from 2001 to 2002, then narrowed again in 2003.
- Alcohol companies spent 27 times more on product ads than on "responsibility" ads. Over the period from 2001 to 2003, alcohol companies spent more than \$2.5 billion on alcohol product ads for television and less than \$92 million on television "responsibility" ads. An additional \$148 million of companies' television ad dollars went to civic, corporate, and other types of community advertising - still more money than was spent on "responsibility" advertising.
- Overall, underage youth ages 12 to 20 were 96 times more likely to see an alcohol product ad than an industry ad against underage drinking. Underage youth of this age group were also 43 times more likely to see an alcohol product ad than an alcohol company ad about safety or drinking and driving.
- "Responsibility" advertising was uneven among companies. Four alcohol companies placed responsibility ads in all three years studied, although 31 placed product ads in all three years.

Alcohol is the number-one drug problem among youth and is responsible for more than 4,500 deaths per year of people under age 21. A federally funded national media campaign was the central recommendation of the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's 2003 report to Congress on reducing underage drinking. Congress has appropriated some funding to an ad campaign from the Advertising Council, and legislation introduced in February would also encourage such a campaign.

"Congress has recognized that our children need to be told the truth about underage drinking," said Jim O'Hara, CAMY executive director. "Now it's time for the public health agencies to step up to the plate."

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