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Model ‘No Buy’ Criteria Could Dramatically Reduce Youth Exposure to TV Alcohol Ads

If adopted, criteria could eliminate billions of ad exposures to underage audiences

A set of “no buy” list criteria developed by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health could greatly reduce underage viewers’ exposure to alcohol advertising on cable TV, a new study finds. “No-buy” lists refer to lists of television programming that advertisers avoid in order to comply with self-regulatory marketing guidelines.

The new report, in the January issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, found that from 2005 through 2012 youth were exposed more than 15 billion times to alcohol ads on television, most of them on cable, that were not in compliance with the alcohol industry’s self-regulatory advertising placement guidelines. The paper outlines a new set of “no buy” list criteria that could eliminate almost all of this non-compliant advertising exposure.

The new set of “no buy” list criteria recommends avoiding ad placements on programs that were previously non-compliant and during times of day when television audiences skew young (like late night). The criteria also recommend being more selective about ad placements on low-rated cable shows.

Excessive alcohol drinking is blamed for 4,300 deaths a year for people under age 21 and is a risk factor among the top three leading causes of death for this age group (accidents, suicide and homicide). At least 14 long-term studies have found that the more underage audiences are exposed to alcohol advertising and marketing, the more likely they are to drink, or if they are already drinking, to drink more. From 2005 through 2012, the alcohol industry spent \$7.5 billion on more than 2 million television ads.

“Even when parents set reasonable limits for their children’s screen time, kids are still being exposed to a staggering number of ads for a product they are not allowed to purchase,” says study author David Jernigan, PhD, director of the [Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth](#) (CAMY) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “Our findings offer a blueprint for reducing youth exposure to alcohol advertising within the current self-regulatory advertising environment.”

The Federal Trade Commission has long recommended “no buy” lists. In its 1999 review of the advertising practices of the alcohol industry, the FTC endorsed “no buy” lists of media that were popular with underage audiences.

“By developing specific ‘no buy’ list criteria, our method offers alcohol advertisers a simple and economically feasible solution to improve compliance with their own guidelines,” says lead author Craig Ross, PhD, a research assistant professor of epidemiology at Boston University and a CAMY consultant.

CAMY plans to issue quarterly reports that assess non-compliant alcohol advertising on cable TV based on the “no buy” list criteria and how this non-compliance varies by program, cable network and daypart. The first report, *Alcohol Advertising Compliance on Cable Television, 1st Quarter 2015*, is available under embargo. It will be publicly available on the CAMY website: <http://www.camy.org>.

“The Potential Impact of a ‘No-Buy’ List in Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising on Cable TV” was written by Craig S. Ross, PhD, MBA, Robert D. Brewer, MD, MSPH, and David Jernigan, PhD. The research was supported by Cooperative Agreement 5U58DP002027 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.