Environmental Management
An Approach to Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention

What Is Environmental Management?

Most campus alcohol and other drug (AOD) programs include prevention, intervention, and treatment services designed to address individual students' knowledge of the consequences of alcohol and other drug use, to improve their skills in resisting such behavior, or to address existing problematic use of or addiction to alcohol or other drugs. Research shows, however, that campuses have had limited success when prevention efforts are limited to these traditional activities. The reason is simple: these activities are designed to prompt individual students to make different decisions about using alcohol and other drugs without making changes in the environment in which they make those decisions.

The field of public health recognizes that health-related behaviors are influenced by multiple factors: individual factors, peer factors, institutional factors, community factors, and public policy. Successful prevention programs address all of these factors in a comprehensive approach. For campuses, it is especially important to complement existing efforts by addressing the physical, social, economic, and legal environment in which students make decisions about AOD use, which can be accomplished through a mix of institutional, community, and public policy change. This is environmental management.

Strategies for Environmental Management

The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention has outlined five primary strategies for achieving environmental change, each designed to address a problem area that contributes to alcohol and other drug use in a typical campus environment. Given the uniqueness of every campus, it remains important for each institution to analyze the factors at work in its community in order to determine which of these strategies should be pursued.

Five Strategies for Environmental Management

1. Offer alcohol-free social, extracurricular, and public service options
2. Create a health-promoting normative environment
3. Restrict the marketing and promotion of alcoholic beverages both on and off campus
4. Limit alcohol availability
5. Increase enforcement of laws and policies

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1. Offering Alcohol-Free Social, Extracurricular, and Public Service Options

Many college and university students have a great deal of unstructured time, few responsibilities, and limited alcohol-free options. Too often, high-risk drinking becomes the default activity. Alcohol-free options, therefore, such as frequent late-night events, expanded student center and athletics facility hours, and public service opportunities, are critical to successful environmental management. These options allow students to make spontaneous social choices that are positive, thus reinforcing the notion that college is a time for personal growth.

2. Creating a Health-Promoting Normative Environment

There is a common perception that high-risk drinking and other drug use are normal parts of the campus experience—rites of passage. Movies, television, and other popular media have perpetuated this widespread belief. An effective strategy to address this issue is to create a healthier normative environment for students. Efforts toward this end may include providing substance-free housing, raising academic expectations (e.g., scheduling more Friday classes and exams), and correcting students' exaggerated perceptions of campus AOD use. This last approach is based on the finding that students tend to vastly

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Alcohol-Free Options

The University of Nebraska created a Web site (www.NUtodo.com) that offers students a list of activities based on needs, interests, and financial resources. The site was developed to address students' frequent comments that they didn't know what entertainment choices were available either on or off campus. NUtodo.com provides a questionnaire asking students to select times, activities, food interests, music types, and budget restrictions; the site then generates alcohol-free options that fit the students' preferences. This central resource for activities allows students to explore their options for having fun without resorting to alcohol.

Normative Environment

The University of Arizona (UA) used a campus coalition, a social norms campaign, and peer education presentations to work toward its goal of reducing heavy drinking on campus. The primary message of the social norms campaign promoted the fact that 69 percent of UA students consume four or fewer drinks at parties. This accurate normative message was used to correct the misperception among students that the majority of their peers drank much more heavily. UA saw a 22 percent drop in heavy drinking within the first 18 months of their social norms program.[1]

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overestimate the levels of drinking taking place among their peers; this overestimation leads to more alcohol use among students who feel a need to fit in with what they think is the campus norm. To address this dilemma, many institutions have implemented social norms campaigns to bring students' perceptions of drinking norms in line with actual student behavior. The result has been a decrease in normative pressures to drink.

3. Restricting the Marketing and Promotion of Alcohol

Local bars and liquor outlets often use aggressive tactics to reach college and university students. Advertisements, media presentations, and alcohol-related promotions are prominent in the environment both on and around campuses. Institutions have found several ways to restrict the marketing and promotion of alcohol, including

- banning all alcohol-related ads, including placements in campus newspapers
- rejecting alcohol industry sponsorship of athletics programs, events, and facilities to avoid sending a mixed message to students
- controlling promotions from local establishments that encourage irresponsible drinking (e.g., happy hours, price reductions, theme nights)

While research on the effectiveness of advertising restrictions in reducing high-risk college drinking is limited, general population studies suggest that such limits on alcohol promotions do appear to reduce alcohol abuse.[2]

Marketing and Promotion

In response to increased alcohol-related incidents, the University at Albany, SUNY, created the Committee on University and Community Relations to unify efforts to address student alcohol-related problems. A key initiative has been the voluntary Tavern Owner Advertisement Agreement. The committee developed voluntary guidelines for local bar and tavern owners that specify allowable on-campus advertising and encourage the avoidance of language or low-price promotions that might encourage irresponsible drinking. Participating tavern owners agree to review the content of their advertising to promote responsible and lawful consumption of alcohol and to help ensure appropriate and civil behavior by students leaving their establishments. Since implementing this program, the University at Albany has seen an 89 percent reduction in hotline calls with complaints about off-campus student drinking, plus an equally dramatic reduction in noise violations recorded by Albany police.

4. Limiting Alcohol Availability

Alcohol is abundantly available and inexpensive for students to obtain, even for those who are under the legal drinking age of 21. To reduce the availability of alcohol, the following measures can be helpful:

- Requiring training programs, both on and off campus, for those serving alcohol
- Limiting container size for alcohol (e.g., keg registration, prohibiting keg delivery)
- Reducing the concentration of alcohol outlets near the campus
- Monitoring IDs to ensure their authenticity

Availability

In September 1999, the University of Delaware began to enforce an 11-year-old policy that requires tailgating to end at the start of a game. Fans must either enter the stadium or leave University of Delaware property. Overall, alumni, students, and community members support the policy. As a result, there has been a reduction in the number of alcohol poisonings and arrests during home football games.

5. Increasing Enforcement of Laws and Policies

Laws and policies regarding alcohol and other drugs are not consistently enforced on most campuses or in many communities. The active and regular enforcement of alcohol-related laws and policies both on and off campus is critical to curbing high-risk drinking. Colleges and universities can implement this strategy by reviewing their campus policies and increasing sanctions for violations. Other activities toward realizing improved enforcement include notifying parents of AOD violations and working with the surrounding community to increase compliance checks of alcohol outlets and off-campus parties.

It is important to note that the five strategies for environmental management are not mutually exclusive. For example, stricter enforcement of laws (e.g., only those 21 and older can purchase beer) will limit alcohol availability. The strategies work together to change the environment for students.

Keys to Success

Implementing strategies for environmental management is not easy. Colleges and universities that have adopted or are moving toward this approach to AOD prevention provide insights for increasing the likelihood of success.

Comprehensive Efforts

Employ several, if not all of the strategies for environmental management to complement the prevention, intervention, and individual treatment efforts already in place on campus.

Strong Presidential Leadership

Visible leadership on alcohol and other drug issues from an institution's president is crucial. Presidents can demonstrate this guidance by repeatedly addressing AOD issues and solutions in writings and speeches and conveying clear expectations and standards.

Faculty Involvement

Professors can infuse AOD issues in their courses, serve as mentors to students, and call for more rigorous academic standards and codes of conduct.

Staff Involvement

For successful comprehensive efforts, staff from a variety of campus offices must be involved. Residence life, athletics, student services, campus police, judicial affairs, health services, and multicultural affairs are examples of the broad-based representation that campuses need to engage in environmental management.

Student Involvement

Students can act as peer leaders and help build support for policy change. Additionally, they can provide a reality check as to how AOD issues affect students and how their peers may react to new campus initiatives and policies.

Needs Assessment and Strategic Planning

Successful AOD prevention efforts begin with a needs assessment to identify the key problem areas. Once these issues are pinpointed, plans are developed to address the campus's specific AOD problems.

Enforcement

The University of Northern Colorado (UNC) uses a campus and community coalition to coordinate local ordinances, enforcement efforts, and educational programs to provide the consistent message that underage drinking is not acceptable. A significant part of this comprehensive program is a cooperative effort between the UNC Drug Prevention/Education Program and campus and local law enforcement agencies to enforce underage drinking laws. Offenders are charged under a municipal ordinance, which means that cases are heard by a local judge who takes them seriously, handles them in a timely fashion, and requires violators to pay fines, attend education classes, and perform community service. During summer orientation, incoming students are told about the enforcement of underage drinking laws and policies and the consequences for violations. During the early weeks of fall semester, teams of local and campus police patrol the off-campus neighborhoods where students live. After these policies were implemented, an on-campus survey indicated a 12 percent decrease in the incidence of heavy alcohol use and a 33 percent reduction in the percentage of students driving after drinking.

Principles of Effectiveness

The U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program promotes "Principles of Effectiveness" that make good sense for any program. These principles can be summed up as follows:

- Do a needs assessment
- Set measurable goals and objectives and design programs to meet those goals and objectives
- Use programs with demonstrated/proven effectiveness
- Evaluate the program to assess progress toward achieving the stated goals and objectives; use the evaluation results to refine, improve, and strengthen the program and to refine the goals and objectives as appropriate

Resources

Without resources in place, even the best planning cannot move forward. Presidential leadership and other high-level support can be very helpful in assuring that AOD efforts are a priority when resources are allocated.

Evaluation

It is essential to monitor the progress and effectiveness of AOD prevention efforts. By measuring outcomes, institutions will have the information they need to make appropriate adjustments or choose new strategies.

Patience and Persistence

Solving AOD issues is a long-term investment that campuses must make. With patience and persistence, there will be progress.

Notes

1. Johannessen, K.; Collins, C.; Mills-Novoa, B.; and Glider, P. *A Practical Guide to Alcohol Abuse Prevention: A Campus Case Study in Implementing Social Norms and Environmental Management Approaches* (University of Arizona Campus Health Service, 1999).

2. Saffer, H. "Alcohol Advertising Bans and Abuse: An International Perspective," *Journal of Health Economics* 10 (1991): 65–79.

Vehicles for Developing Successful Comprehensive Prevention Programs

It is difficult for a single person or office to bring about environmental change on campus and in the surrounding community. Many colleges and universities have formed AOD task forces to develop and implement comprehensive prevention approaches, including strategies for environmental management. These task forces represent broad spectrums of interests and constituencies, including a variety of campus offices, students, faculty, and executive-level leaders. Other campuses have joined with representatives from the surrounding community to form more extensive task forces to address AOD issues that reach beyond campus. Task forces hold many advantages through their collaborative work, including

- improving program capacity
- avoiding duplication of effort
- increasing the consistency of messages
- strengthening advocacy
- creating a comprehensive program approach
- increasing potential for success

Additionally, the Higher Education Center promotes the development of statewide and regional initiatives. These collaborations involve concerted efforts by several institutions of higher education, state government officials, and community organizations to change the campus and community environment. These broad bases of support for addressing AOD issues can lead to state-level policy changes, such as more stringent blood alcohol limits for drivers and increased penalties for selling alcohol to minors.

The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention

The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention, established by the U.S. Department of Education, provides nationwide support for campus alcohol and other drug prevention efforts.

The mission of the Center is to assist institutions of higher education in developing, implementing, and evaluating alcohol, other drug, and violence prevention policies and programs that will foster students' academic and social development and promote campus and community safety.

The Center offers the following services:

- Training and professional development activities
- Technical assistance: Resources, referrals, and consultations
- Publication and dissemination of prevention materials
- Support for the Network of Colleges and Universities Committed to the Elimination of Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Assessment, evaluation, and analysis activities

Visit the Higher Education Center's Web site at www.edc.org/hec for more detailed information on environmental management and for more examples of what campuses are doing to implement the strategies presented in this update.

Resources

Publications on environmental management available from the Higher Education Center:

DeJong, W.; Vince-Whitman, C.; Colthurst, T.; Cretella, M.; Gilbreath, M.; Rosati, M.; and Zweig, K. ***Environmental Management: A Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Alcohol and Other Drug Use on College Campuses*** (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, 1998).

Fisher, Deborah A. ***Environmental Strategies to Prevent Alcohol Problems on College Campuses*** (Rockville, Md.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, prepared by Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, 1999).

DeJong, W. and Langford, L.. ***Prevention Update*** **"Evaluating Environmental Management Approaches to Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention"** (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, 2006).