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

#### 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 overwhelming the reality and greatly overestimate the prevalence of high-risk drinking on campus.

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 60 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.

### 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

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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

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

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 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.

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
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:

