

Will this help teenagers to drink responsibly?



Miss Tui Competition

New Zealand's liquor industry has an advertising code, which prohibits associating alcohol with social or sexual success. The code is cynically and frequently broken, by an industry which should have its "self-regulating" privileges withdrawn.

Please read the evidence below, as you determine what should be done in New Zealand's serious situation.

AN IMPORTANT TIME TO THINK WHERE WE ARE GOING WITH ALCOHOL

THE DRINKING AGE HAS BEEN LEFT UNCHANGED ; THE GOVERNMENT HAS PROMISED TO ACT ON YOUTH DRINKING.
HOW INFORMED ARE YOU? AND WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

We present information directly addressing causes of the worsening youth alcohol culture, backed by university research. This document includes just one of hundreds of pages which show how advertising penetrates the thinking of youth, in this case Maori.

The Ministerial review of the regulatory framework around alcohol advertising and sponsorship is in response to our Group Against Liquor Advertising's petition. This letter is being sent to all MPs.

A complete rethink on alcohol and youth culture is needed.

It is important that all MPs and interested parties recognise the increasingly serious situation and changes that justify this re-thinking, especially since Martin Gallagher's bill has failed. (That suggested raising the drinking age, and had inadequate suggestions about advertising and sponsorship.)

Serious: Statistics for New Zealand show an alarming increase in:

- youth binge drinking (number of drinks per occasion has doubled in past 10 years)
- young women's alcohol consumption
- hospital admissions for intoxicated 11 – 17 year olds
- teenage drinking: \$140 million worth of alcohol per year.

Most major newspapers and respectable periodicals (NZ Herald, NZ Listener, North and South) have featured major articles of concern. Social and youth workers, police, Maori wardens, and hospital intensivist doctors have said the same. Monday newspapers regularly feature alcohol violence from all around the country.

Changes:

- Alcohol advertising and sponsorship techniques are increasingly sophisticated, and internationally planned as never before. The young are prime targets. Alcohol advertising is not purely factual (prices, product description, availability) but relies strongly on association with sport and social success.

- New products like spirits-based ready-mixed drinks are aimed specifically at the youth market. Consumption of these has increased five-fold since 1997. Scottish research shows the industry even knows the preferences of 11 – 14 and 15 – 17 year old groups.

Vast advertising expenditure promotes and increases a youth alcohol culture through an emphasis on the sporty, humorous, wacky, and sexy. This undermining any good intent contained in the industry's **voluntary code**, which prohibits promoting the view that alcohol will give social or sexual success. That association of alcohol with sexuality is agreed, by many Western countries, to be an unfair spin because young people cannot resist it. Sexual enthusiasm and limited judgment are normal for the young.

The code is continually broken by the industry, showing it is hypocritical and unfit for self-regulation. "Her butt just walked into my hand-Yeah right!" This really means:"If you're one of our guys and drink lots of our beer you'll be cool, sexy, have mates, and girls, and be a man."

Increasingly, university research papers show evidence of this influence on youth. Many are on our website, (Prof. Snyder, Connecticut University , and Massey University research.)

Both the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association are calling for more determined action on alcohol advertising.

Self-regulation is a sham; specious reasons are given for turning down complaints. TV advertising time was recently brought forward from 9 pm to 8.30 in spite of the above statistics.

Unless we influence earliest beliefs of teenagers about the role of alcohol, we will not win this battle. The best slogan to prevent alcohol harm would therefore be :

**"It's not just the drinking ,
it's the way we THINK."**

We are naïve if we do not recognize the huge continual financial input into keeping and enhancing that youth culture. Advertising and

sponsorship are not the only sources of beliefs and attitudes, but any programme which does not tackle their alluring promises is bound to fail.

The alcohol industry asks us to believe that these promote only brand loyalty, and do not affect consumption. If this were true, why would the industry oppose a collective ban? Moreover, much brand identification has entered youth culture, convincing them that more alcohol equals more fun, sexual success, social acceptance and being grown-up. (See example in McCreanor's paper below) Newer marketing techniques are very sophisticated e.g. internet / e-mail / texting, are designed to be "**beneath the parental radar**". Young people tell researchers that the advertising, T-shirts' promotions and prizes "keep reminding us of our last good booze-up."

There is no doubt that the code against combining sexuality with alcohol advising is commonly broken. Visit www.tui.co.nz, click on "Tui albums," then "Miss Tui 2006," then "check out the gallery", a competition shown on this front page. The Tui TV ads flagrantly disobey the code.

A cycling NZ coach said, (NZ Herald, 3 5 06), "Heavy drinking is endemic to all sporting codes. It's in a way an icon of sport." The liquor industry supports only measures shown by research to be ineffective, such as education campaigns. These cannot work while \$35M is spent annually here on advertising which persuades young people of the opposite, and more is spent on sponsorship and other promotions. Sponsorship is heavily associated with sports. Other businesses should be encouraged to take up sports sponsorship. The alcohol industry will survive without advertising or sponsorship.

Serious problems require decisive solutions.

The Government is right that we must address the basic problem of attitudes to drinking. Returning the purchase age to 20, limiting advertising to after 10 pm and an educational campaign don't go far enough. This is because young people will always respond more to the irresponsible promises of social and sexual success made by alcohol advertising.

No-one wants to interfere with moderate pleasure, but alcohol harm is tragic for many drinkers. Worse, it involves all of us, as in road crashes, domestic and street violence, suicide, home invasion, rape, and filling up hospital beds. The damage is greater than that of tobacco, and all people deserve at least as much protection.

A ban on advertising, and gradually on sponsorship, (as in France, Norway and Sweden), may also be only part of the answer. But what it

would do is stop the conflicting messages, and mean that we have done everything possible to create a safer community. It would demonstrate to young and old that alcohol use (although enjoyable, like the use of a motor vehicle) can be a very serious matter.

We must stop both advertising and sponsorship by the alcohol industry. If we do not, we are not serious about changing youth alcohol culture.

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An Interview With A Young Maori Man.

McCreanor T, Massey University Social Health Outcomes Research Evaluation, Auckland

"Mike: . . . those ads . . . you can view yourself as one of those blokes . . . like those DB Draught [beer], I mean DB Draught tastes like crap but um the ads are really good you know? The working man, you know the good honest kiwi bloke, the Speights [beer] ad, you know like, that was a classic ad . . . and even, yeah a lot of like Steinlager ads like yeah they're just really powerful . . . their message is like, it's not only the beer but like the Steinlager man . . . it's like be the man, you can or something . . . and one of them's motto is "know who you are" and they're just really powerful messages. It's really good marketing. (Male, 17 years)"

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"Several important insights are available from this young man's analysis of contemporary beer advertisements on television in this country. Overall he is a discerning consumer of the marketing,.... making distinction between the pitch and product, and passing judgment on campaigns with accolades like "classic", "really good" and "powerful".....

A critical insight is the observation that the company's message is far more than "drink our beer", it is the vastly more important message "know who you are", strive to "be the man that you are capable of being."

The brand is positioned in a mentoring, almost parental role in the development of Mike's identity and it is this relationship that fuels the warmth of his final statements, which can be read as an appreciation of the sage advice more than an ironic dismissal of the sophistication of the marketing."

**For further information see:
www.gala.org.nz, click on: 'Fact sheet'**