



Working together to make Thurston County a community where children and youth are supported, healthy, safe and valued.

Community Assessment Project Report

Research shows a direct relationship between exposure to alcohol and tobacco advertisements and youth use of these products. Early initiation of substance use is a risk factor for addiction and subsequent problems. TOGETHER!'s youth-driven Community Assessment Project (CAP) was designed to assess alcohol and tobacco advertising in Thurston County convenience stores. To gather our data, we surveyed 69 small stores of over 200 total tobacco and alcohol retail stores in Thurston County. Through this project, our goal is to provide education and technical assistance to retailers and community members to reduce tobacco and alcohol advertising to youth.



An average Thurston County store front

Tobacco and Alcohol Advertisements

Our teams counted 864 total tobacco ads (indoor and outdoor) with an average of about 15 total tobacco ads per store (indoor and outdoor). The majority (over 71%) of tobacco ads were inside stores. We counted 1,216 total alcohol ads (indoor and outdoor) with an average of about 21 total alcohol ads per store (indoor and outdoor). More than two-thirds (67%) of those alcohol ads were inside stores.

Advertisements by Store Type

We asked youth teams to report whether stores were a part of a recognized chain or an independent store. Approximately 59% of the stores that we surveyed were identified as chain stores and 41% of the stores were identified as independent. When we looked at tobacco and alcohol advertising by store type, on average we found more tobacco ads at chain stores (12 tobacco ads per chain store versus 9 per independent store) and more alcohol ads at independent stores (28 alcohol ads per independent store versus 15 per chain store).

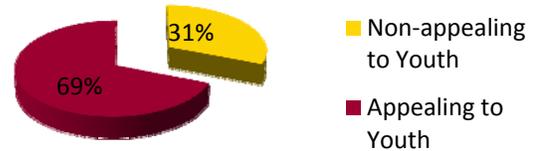
Advertisements Determined by Youth as “Appealing to Youth”

In our survey, we asked the youth if they saw tobacco or alcohol advertisements that they thought “appealed to youth.” Of our 69 stores, 69% were reported as having at least some alcohol advertisements that “appeal to youth” and 38% of stores had tobacco advertisements that “appeal to youth.”



Sports teams like the Seahawks and college teams like the Huskies appeal to youth

Alcohol Advertisements



Youth found over 121 instances in which they determined that ads were appealing to them. The most commonly reported themes that appeal to youth included Washington state sports teams, including college teams; sex appeal; using “youthful-looking” adults; cartoons; balloons; inflatable items; and outdoor activities like snowboarding, skydiving and beach scenes.

Product Placement and Items that Appeal to Youth

The youth surveyors reported that many of the tobacco and alcohol products and advertisements were placed near candy and chips/snack products. Many stores had tobacco products near the front counter, with some stores placing fruit-flavored cigars and “blunt wrap” cigar rolling papers on the counter near candy and where youth can easily access them. Some stores had coolers designated for alcohol near candy aisles, with sweeter alcohol like hard lemonades and wine coolers at the eye level of children; some also had coolers designated for sodas, like Pepsi coolers, but both non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks were placed in the same exact cooler. More than 2 in 5 stores (42%) had large in-store displays of alcohol, which were often stacks of beer on the retail floor.

In addition, stores featured alcohol and tobacco products that appeal to youth. Many stores sold “jerky chew,” a shredded beef jerky product packaged in a container that looks just like a can of chewing tobacco. Youth also found some alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks to have similar flavor options and container styles/colors. Often, alcoholic energy drinks were placed next to non-alcoholic energy drinks, Gatorade or other fruit-flavored drinks that were in cans.

Alcoholic and Non-alcoholic Energy Drink Price Comparison

Price is an important factor in youth use. Higher prices for tobacco and alcohol generally result in a decrease in youth use. CAP data showed that alcoholic energy drinks were cheaper than non-alcoholic energy drinks. On average, 24-ounce alcoholic energy drinks were \$0.25 cheaper than 24-ounce non-alcoholic energy drinks; in some stores, 24-ounce alcoholic energy drinks were up to \$1.00 cheaper than the same size of non-alcoholic energy drinks.



Alcoholic energy drinks look just like non-alcoholic energy drinks and on average, they're cheaper

Drug Paraphernalia and Related Items



This “blunt wrap” is a strawberry kiwi flavored tobacco product often used with marijuana

In addition to tobacco and alcohol observations, we asked the youth to comment on the presence and type of drug-related items. The presence of drug-related items in convenience stores may send a message to youth and community members that using drugs is acceptable. More than one-third (approximately 38%) of stores surveyed had drug-related items ranging from “blunt wraps,” which are large rolling paper made for tobacco, often purchased to roll marijuana, to glass pipes and elaborate hookahs, both of which are sold for tobacco smoking but often are used to smoke marijuana and/or other drugs. One store carried a line of T-shirts with famous cartoon characters and “youth-friendly” messaging that also contained drug referencing material on them, such as marijuana leaves, while other stores sold marijuana leaf jewelry and other novelty items.

Next Steps

TOGETHER! is sharing these findings with community members, stakeholders, partners and the media. Our community matters. Encourage stores to reduce youth exposure to tobacco and alcohol advertisement and reduce youth access to tobacco and alcohol. Join us in asking stores to:

- Remove tobacco and alcohol advertisements (especially those which appeal to youth)
- Place all tobacco products behind the counter
- Place tobacco and alcohol away from products that appeal to youth
- Display the TOGETHER! window cling and refuse to sell tobacco or alcohol to minors

TOGETHER! is also visiting participating stores to provide confidential, individual store results and ask stores to be a part of the solution. We offer technical assistance to all retailers interested in reducing youth exposure to tobacco and alcohol advertising and youth access to those products. We will leave each store with a packet of information including results, this report, an educational poster on how to properly check ID and a window cling decal sending a clear message that their store does not sell tobacco or alcohol to minors.



Stores displaying this TOGETHER! window cling send a clear message to the community!

In addition, we will be supporting the Liquor Control Board to educate retailers to comply with recent amendments to the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), which limit alcohol advertisements visible from the outside to no more than four individual advertisements, no larger than 1,600 square inches each. Community members are also encouraged to ask stores to remove alcohol advertisements visible from the outside that exceed the number or size allowable by law, as well as let our agency know when they see stores out of compliance with this rule. Because there are currently no limitations in Washington state for alcohol advertisements inside stores or for tobacco advertisements inside or outside of stores, we will also work to raise awareness about this disparity.

We envision this project will serve as a stepping stone for refining efforts and continuing to collect information annually to help identify emerging opportunities and assess the impact of education and community mobilization on tobacco and alcohol advertisement and youth access to those products.

For more information, for technical assistance or to discuss these findings with our staff, please contact TOGETHER! at **360.493.2230**.