

RRForum Recommended Practices for Off-Premises Alcohol Retailers

The RRF's Retailer Work Group—consisting of national retail chains, training organizations and mystery shop vendors; state regulators and attorneys general; producers; and researchers—has identified recommended practices to reduce underage sales and service of alcohol by off-premises licensees. Every responsible retailer should adopt these practices. The list is not all-inclusive and retailers may engage in additional practices to reduce illegal underage sales.

1. Create and maintain a written sales policy. Establishments should have a *written policy* identifying steps that staff must take for every transaction, including:

- ✓ *What perceived age triggers an ID check?*
- ✓ *What are acceptable forms of ID and when is a 2nd form of ID required?*
- ✓ *What should be done if an ID appears to be fake or if a 3rd party sale (such as a “shoulder-tap”) is suspected?*
- ✓ *When and how should a sale be refused?*
- ✓ *What record keeping and supervisor notification are required when problems occur?*
- ✓ *What consequences will be imposed when staff fail to check IDs?*

Important Note: The written policy should include state and local laws for all employees to read and understand.

2. Train staff and management on the alcohol sales policy. All staff should be fully trained *before* being permitted to sell alcohol. Training should include:

- ✓ Information on the risks of underage use of alcohol products.
- ✓ Pertinent local and state laws.
- ✓ Every aspect of the store policies identified in Practice #1, above.
- ✓ Roll-playing on how to request an ID and deny a sale in a non-confrontational manner.
- ✓ Local laws may set additional specific training requirements.
- ✓ Training for managers should also include training of clerks and supervision to insure adherence to these practices. Managers should review and reinforce training with staff periodically.

Important note: If training is segmented—for instance, if a new hire receives in-person training by a manager, followed by in-depth training later—that employee should be carefully monitored because research shows that newly-hired employees are more likely to sell alcohol to an underage customer.

3. Provide the right tools. Providing appropriate tools helps staff to sell responsibly. These tools should be used in the most appropriate combination to provide the requisite support to the seller:

- ✓ Program registers to recognize age-restricted products and prompt cashiers to require ID.
- ✓ If possible, program registers to read IDs electronically and calculate age, or use a stand-alone electronic ID scanner and/or a “black light” wand, in states in which these technologies can determine the authenticity of an ID.
- ✓ If built-in or stand-alone electronic ID verification is not possible, employ a specialty calendar showing birth dates eligible to buy.
- ✓ Use daily shift reminders that remind staff about the importance of checking IDs and the date of birth on, or before which, a customer is old enough to purchase alcohol.
- ✓ Provide a current ID guidebook that shows valid ID formats for all states and US territories.

Important Note: Prominently display signs giving notice that your establishment checks IDs. These signs help staff assert company policy and deter underage sales attempts.

4. Monitor staff conduct. Rigorously monitor staff performance as a quality control strategy:

- ✓ Conduct “mystery shop” inspections—attempted purchases by customers young enough to trigger the establishment’s ID-checking requirement—to provide staff and managers with feedback on staff performance. RRF currently recommends 6-12 visits a year.
- ✓ Mystery shopper results and the results of law enforcement compliance checks should be reviewed promptly with *all* staff—not just with the individual clerk who waited on the mystery shopper. Feedback to staff members who fail to check IDs should include counseling and re-training. The consequences for a 2nd failure may include suspension or termination.
- ✓ Review point-of-sale video tapes and cash register data or other internal monitoring systems to supplement mystery shop inspections. New employees in particular should be reviewed.

Important note: Positive feedback to staff members who successfully check IDs—including small tangible gifts, “comp” time and public recognition—may have an even greater impact on staff behavior than penalties imposed upon clerks who fail to check IDs.

5. Employ security practices to reduce underage theft. Use theft deterrent equipment and/or a floor plan that keeps alcohol shelves and coolers unobstructed for store management and staff and permits staff to monitor customers and reduce alcohol theft.

6. Keep records. Records may be used for communicating front line challenges to management, for positive recognition programs for employees, and for demonstrating your company’s RR practices.

- ✓ Document all training, mystery shops, law enforcement compliance checks, and disciplinary actions in staff personnel records.
- ✓ Keep an unusual occurrence log and any related video.
- ✓ Appoint a high-level employee to oversee the store’s compliance with laws concerning the sale and marketing of age-restricted products and these Recommended Practices.

7. Communicate with the public. Be a community asset. Retailers serve their communities when they post information about their commitment to enforcing the legal age of purchase and the importance of preventing teen access to alcohol.

- ✓ Post signs about your ID checking policies at the entrance and near registers where age-restricted products are sold.
- ✓ Establish working relationships with local law enforcement.
- ✓ Get involved in industry associations and the community to express a commitment to prevent underage sales and use.

Important note: Since responsible retailing shifts underage access from commercial to social sources, the community can benefit from messages from you warning adults not to furnish alcohol to minors.

8. Don’t market to youth. Alcohol products should not be displayed in an area that contains sodas, snack foods or energy drinks—especially since some alcohol products can look like non-alcoholic drinks.

- ✓ Don’t display youth-oriented advertising for alcohol products in your store.
- ✓ Free product sampling may be inappropriate if youth are permitted in the store.
- ✓ Don’t advertise alcohol products in college or high school publications, or outdoors near schools or playgrounds.

9. Most importantly: Responsible Retailing is a management responsibility. Every aspect of preventing underage sales and service is a management responsibility. *Continually discussing the importance of preventing underage and 3rd party sales with staff is the surest way for managers to*

avoid the penalties and liabilities—for themselves, their employees, their customers and their communities—that are associated with underage alcohol sales and use.