Building Healthy Neighborhoods in the East Bay: An Alcohol Advocacy Resource for Activists
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**Introduction: Why Alcohol?**

As an HIV and substance abuse prevention project, we at Berkeley Builds Capacity are always thinking about the ways that HIV and substance use intersect, and how we can do a better job promoting healthy, sustainable change at the community level.

In a meeting with HIV prevention organizations, the group identified several ways in which alcohol consumption and availability (often invisible in discussions of HIV prevention) impacts HIV risk. In particular, we recognized that low-income and college neighborhoods, though different in other respects, both suffer from an over-concentration of liquor stores, and that many people do not have the time or resources to do the background research necessary to understand and address this community problem.

This resource is a direct result of that conversation. We ask that you read it through, share it widely, and use it to fuel/add to your own conversations about alcohol density and community health.

In solidarity,
Berkeley Builds Capacity

**The Alcohol Landscape in the East Bay: Some Background**

Many low-income and college neighborhoods suffer from an over-concentration of liquor stores and associated health and safety problems. Neighborhoods with higher concentrations of liquor stores have increased rates of alcohol-related hospitalizations, drunk-driving accidents, pedestrian injuries, crime and violence\(^1\). From an HIV prevention perspective, we also know that heavy drinking increases the chance of unprotected sex. While one can clearly demonstrate many of the negative impacts of excess liquor stores, it is harder to distinguish an effective course of action. This resource attempts to clarify how we-as community members and members of health organizations-can participate in issues of excess alcohol availability. What follows is an overview of the strategies and recommendations of past East Bay activists.

Community members in Oakland have battled the over-concentration of alcohol vendors, with success. In 2004, overwhelming community concern led to a report “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly” that found Oakland was over-concentrated by 74 liquor stores. A collaboration between health organizations, the Alameda County
Health Department, and the City of Oakland led to a renewed vigor of enforcing alcohol sale regulations, resulting in a net decrease of 51 liquor stores five years later. If you want to learn more about these and other successful efforts in Oakland, we recommend reading these publications:

- City Attorney John Russo Report on the Status of Liquor Stores in Oakland
- Follow-Up Report in 2009 by City Attorney John Russo
  [http://www.oaklandcityattorney.org/PDFS/Council%20Reports/Liquor%20Stores%202009.pdf](http://www.oaklandcityattorney.org/PDFS/Council%20Reports/Liquor%20Stores%202009.pdf)
- 2007 Amortization to Further Reduce Overconcentration

There still exists an over-concentration of liquor stores in at least Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, and San Pablo. The reasons for the perpetual over-concentration are unclear. [Background: the rules on issuing and removing alcohol licenses are set by the California, but local governments have the ability to regulate land use to protect the health and safety of citizens, as well as to promote economic growth.] According to a Berkeley journal article, two important contributing factors are a 1995 state law that allows planning officials to “approve liquor licenses even if police, communities, or state regulators object.” Even if a community has an overconcentration of liquor stores or an overconcentration of crime, planning committees can grant a liquor license if they determine that it would provide an “economic boost” to the community (although a calculation of economic benefits does not take into account the cost of higher morbidity, HIV, etc). Additionally, the low concentration of licenses in “the east side of Alameda County… allows more to be grouped together in another area.”

**What We Can Do About It: Strategies**

So what can be done? As stakeholders in community health, we must work to convince public officials that they should regulate alcohol access and availability. This requires changing the mindset that public health and safety consequences are solely the result of individual choices and responsibilities. Therefore, in terms of broad strategies, we recommend working towards:

- noticing, measuring, speaking about the cost to the community and the health costs to individuals of excess alcohol availability
- working together to ensure that the impact of advocacy in one community does not have unintentional, adverse impacts on other communities
Another reasonable strategy would be to reduce the number of liquor licenses or to alter how vendors are regulated. The following recommendations come from a report on Contra Costa County by the Pacific Institute entitled “Liquor Stores and Community Health”¹ and mirror what was successful about Oakland’s efforts:

- Zoning ordinances to restrict new liquor store development (does not address existing stores)
- Enforce maintenance and design guidelines for liquor stores, such as restrictions on storefront liquor advertising
- Assist in converting liquor stores to grocery stores and other retail that meet community needs.
- Enforce ordinances to restrict public nuisance activities around liquor stores.

How You Can Get Involved

So, how can you get involved? You could attend a local City Council Meeting or Neighborhood Council Meeting to voice your concerns. These meeting times were accurate as of July 2012:

- Richmond: First and Third Tuesday of every month, 5pm, Civic Center Campus, 440 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond
- San Pablo: First and Third Monday of each month, 6pm, City Hall Council Chambers at 13831 San Pablo Avenue
- Berkeley: Tuesdays (two to three per month), 7pm, 2134 Martin Luther King Jr Way, Berkeley
- Oakland: First, Third, and Fifth Tuesdays of every month, 5:30pm, 3rd floor City Hall, 1 Frank H Ogawa Plaza, Oakland

Alternatively, you can directly protest new liquor licenses, the transfer of an existing liquor license to a new owner, or the regulations impacting a vendor who has violated local or state alcohol laws (e.g. selling to minors). As an example of this type of advocacy, see a presentation to Berkeley City Council that calls for renewed regulations to reduce community harms related to excess alcohol availability in Berkeley:

If you have the interest and capacity to make a sustained advocacy effort, you might refer to the following guidelines. These were provided by Ed Kikumoto, former director of the Alcohol Policy Network which was instrumental in affecting policy change in Oakland and Berkeley [note: the APN no longer exists due to lack of funding]:

**Find someone to train and assist the community in:**

a) Knowledge of both the ABC's licensing approval and local zoning application approval procedures including protests and appeals.

b) Knowledge of both ABC's and local zoning requirements for density and Public Convenience or Necessity.

c) Knowledge of the numbers of licenses already existing in a census tract and crime rate in the police district encompassing the store location.

d) Knowledge of how to evaluate (b) and (c) in order to know if over-concentration exists; whether a finding of Public Convenience or Necessity is required; and who will make the finding - the ABC license applicant or local governing body?

e) Establishing grounds for a protest to the ABC license application and/or zoning approval based on (b), (c) and (d), as a purely legal matter.

f) Establishing grounds for protest based on public health and safety issues - alcohol related crime, PD calls for service, public nuisance issues, anecdotal evidence provided by the community - i.e., local data establishing risk and harm.

h) Sufficient writing skills to submit any arguments in opposition in writing to the proper authorities.

h) How to organize, mobilize and lobby; public speaking and media advocacy - arguing for public health and safety is an exercise in political advocacy.

**Additional Resources**

For technical assistance/ training related to primary environmental prevention of alcohol issues, especially in an outreach context, consult the Center for Community Action and Training: [http://www.ccat-ca.org/about-us.html](http://www.ccat-ca.org/about-us.html)

You may find news, research, and policy recommendations related to alcohol marketing from Alcohol Justice (formerly the Marin Institute): [http://alcoholjustice.org/resources.html](http://alcoholjustice.org/resources.html)

CITATIONS


