



FACT SHEET

ENVIRONMENTAL PREVENTION

Overview

Environmental prevention is a systems approach to changing community settings, public policies and community norms in order to decrease problems related to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD). This approach recognizes that ATOD-related problems extend beyond just the individual user. Environmental prevention has gained interest and support nationally.

The goal of environmental prevention is to reduce economic, interpersonal and social costs imposed on a community, neighborhood, organization, family and employer due to immediate and/or collateral problems related to ATOD use/abuse.

ATOD Prevention

ATOD prevention involves strategies, programs and initiatives to reduce direct and indirect adverse personal, social, health and safety consequences resulting from problematic ATOD availability, manufacture, distribution, promotion and sales, as well as individual use.

ATOD prevention promotes healthy and safe environments for individuals, families, and communities.

Process

Environmental prevention involves developing and/or modifying written and unwritten community standards, codes, practices and norms to reduce the frequency and severity of ATOD-related problems. This involves cooperative

efforts by various agencies to develop support for solutions, formal adoption of plans, and follow-through with monitoring and enforcement to assure that the changes become sustainable community norms.

Moving prevention beyond traditional individual-based ATOD prevention depends on generating community-wide interest in having a healthy, safe and less costly community. This systems approach engages fields such as education, health care, social services, and law enforcement, which commonly focus on specific individuals. Although the mission of these other fields is not primarily ATOD prevention, all are affected by and benefit from effective prevention.

Environmental strategies can apply to specific places (problem alcohol outlets, public areas, the workplace, shopping areas, and housing areas) or events (graduation parties, sporting events, concerts, and street fairs). The focus is on measurable ATOD-related problems such as drug dealing, police incidents, loitering, violence, and public drinking that impose risk, cost or poor quality of life on the public.

Environmental prevention interventions occur through, or with, three interacting parties that are responsible for a given location or event:

1. The *property owner* who has direct/legal responsibility for what occurs at a place or event.
2. *Residents/neighbors/employees*, who occupy the location and are affected by, enable, confront, or ignore the problem.
3. *Officials/managers* who have oversight/responsibility for health, safety, economic, and social issues of a setting (i.e., supervisor, code enforcement, police, teacher).

Successful environmental prevention requires a clearly defined purpose that evolves from a local assessment of problems. This unifying purpose helps participants work through challenges posed by resistance from those benefiting from the current ATOD status quo. Successful environmental prevention also requires that the implemented changes are supported, enforced, and sustained.

Environmental prevention shares common ground with a public health model, which describes problems in terms of the inter-relationships among the:

1. Agent – Any ATOD substance which is potentially harmful to individuals, society or the economy when they are used, marketed, available, etc.
2. Host – The person who is a current, former or potential ATOD consumer. Environmental approaches may also consider manufacturing, supplying, and marketing ATOD substances as hosting.
3. Environment – The setting in which hosts and agents interact that may amplify or moderate problems.

Environmental Prevention Examples

Approaches to alcohol problems:

- Ending alcohol sales before dark at public events
- Selling only single-cup servings at public settings
- Quality Responsible Beverage Server training
- Refusing alcohol-funded sponsorship of community events
- Publicizing the use of cellular phones to notify police of suspected DUIs
- Sober graduation events
- College campus alcohol policies for underage students
- Social norming and media awareness
- Employer alcohol policies to prohibit use during the work day
- Employers not paying for alcohol on expense accounts
- Alcohol-free, employer-hosted social activities, parties and employer-sponsored team events
- Community police compliance checks for illegal sales to underage persons
- Zoning and land-use conditions
- Social host ordinances

Approaches to illegal drug problems:

- Water lawns in parks during evening hours to preclude activity
- Lighting requirements outside alcohol outlets where drug dealing/use occurs
- Classical or unpopular music on outdoor speakers where loitering and drug use/sale occurs
- Employer drug-free workplace policies
- Student/Employer/Employee Assistance Program services
- Employer-conducted drug testing
- After-school safe study rooms for grades K-12
- Notification by colleges to parents about their children's alcohol/drug offenses

- Train retailers about products they sell that have potential for inhalant abuse
- Compliance checks by underage youth for illegal tobacco sales
- Pharmacy practices to track prescriptions and identify abuse patterns
- Emergency Department practices to identify, screen and refer ATOD-related injuries
- Community-oriented policing

Technical Assistance Information

Cost-free technical assistance is available through ADP's Community Prevention Initiative (CPI), www.ca-cpi.org. Publications and other resources also are available.

ADP's Resource Center Clearinghouse Catalog offers free printed materials, including information on environmental prevention. The catalog includes publication #3501, "Environmental Approach to Community AOD Prevention," which offers lessons learned through environmental prevention work over the past 20 years. For additional information, contact the Program Services Division, Prevention Services Branch, at (916) 324-4398.