

## Taxing times of 2011

Last year in Nebraska, an alcohol-related crash occurred every five hours, totaling 1,687 alcohol-related crashes.

A rash of drunken driving fatalities has brought a strong reaction from Nebraska senators who continue working hard to address this issue through proven policy strategies to deter drinking driving behavior. Yet, peeling back the layers of the drinking driving issue, other problems surface, including excessive alcohol consumption and underage drinking, both often leading factors in drinking driving.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been paving the way, providing informational resources and studies regarding excessive alcohol consumption and drinking driving behavior.

These evidence-based strategies were discussed on Oct. 11th at a legislative interim hearing where Sen. Harr and his colleagues introduced LR 249 to study the issue.

"We're pleased the Legislature has chosen to take a serious look at Nebraska alcohol control policies," said Diane Riibe, executive director for Project Extra Mile. "Strong policies and continued enforcement are key to preventing tragic consequences resulting from alcohol consumption. We would encourage our policymakers to look at proven strategies outlined in the research to guide them in their efforts."

A year ago, the CDC gathered an independent task force of experts to conduct a systematic review of the research on effective strategies to reduce and prevent excessive alcohol consumption - the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Increasing alcohol taxes emerged as one of the most effective strategies a state can implement to fight this battle, according to the task force's review, thus becoming one of the top recommendations of the group.

Between 1960 and 1985, Nebraska increased its alcohol tax seven times. In the 25 years that followed, rates were raised minimally and just once in 2003. Yet costs associated with excessive alcohol

consumption and underage drinking continue to soar.

New figures show that Nebraska taxpayers paid out \$423 million or \$2,309 for each youth in the state in underage drinking costs in 2010. These sales provided profits of \$73 million to the alcohol industry.

Now, nearly a decade after the last tax increase, the discussion turns back to taxing alcohol as a way to generate additional revenue. The revenue collected could provide funding for increased resources, such as enforcement, education, treatment and prevention services - all critical components when working to address the complex public health issue of underage drinking.

Maryland, the only state to increase its alcoholic beverage tax in 2011, increased its sales tax on alcohol from six percent to nine percent, expecting to bring an additional \$85 million in tax revenue to the state annually. Maryland's increase went into effect July 1, 2011 and is now viewed as an alcohol tax role model for the rest of the states.

Public health advocates remain hopeful that policymakers will see the importance of raising taxes on alcohol and understand the public's support for such action.

"We know our young people are more price sensitive than adults," said David Corbin, Ph.D., and emeritus professor for the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. "By placing a higher tax on alcoholic beverages, research shows the overall effect can deter underage drinkers access to alcohol through a reasonable countermeasure."

Sources:  
Guide to Community Preventive Services. Preventing excessive alcohol consumption: increasing alcohol taxes. [www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/increasingtaxes.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/increasingtaxes.html). Last updated: 06/14/2011.

Coate, D. & Grossman, M. (1998). The effects of alcoholic beverage prices and legal drinking ages on youth alcohol use. *The Journal of Law and Economics*. 31(1):145.

Pacific Institute on Research & Evaluation (2010). Underage Drinking in Nebraska: The Facts. Washington, DC: OJDP. Retrieved November 16, 2011, from <http://www.udetc.org/factsheets/NE.pdf>.

## Weigh-in on super-sized products

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has issued an order against Phusion Products, the producer of the lead super-sized product Four Loko, requesting several provisions for the company to adhere to, including re-labeling its packaging to fully disclose the amount of alcohol contained in the product. The products contain as much alcohol as four to five cans of beer.

Additionally, attorneys general in 35 states, including neighboring states, Colorado, Iowa, South Dakota and Wyoming have weighed-in on the super-sized products of Four Loko, asking the FTC to limit the amount of alcohol sold in a single-serving can according to a Nov. 18 article in the *Des Moines Register*.

Community members are encouraged to submit comment to the FTC in order to have input on the harms attributed by these super-sized products. The deadline to submit comment is Friday, Dec. 2. The form to submit comments and additional information about the products can be accessed at [www.projectextramile.org](http://www.projectextramile.org).

Call to Action

## A message from the Director

The holiday season is a time to reflect on the year's successes. During this time, we're reminded of our sincere gratitude and deep appreciation for the work of many who tirelessly lend a helping hand to ensure young people have an opportunity to thrive as we work collectively to prevent underage drinking and youth access to alcohol.

As 2011 nears a close, and you think of your end-of-year charitable donations, we hope you'll consider Project Extra Mile.

With warm regards,

*Diane*

## Vodka, malt liquor most likely to buy trip to ER

Vodka and malt beverages were the forms of alcohol most likely to have been consumed by patients who wound up at the emergency department seeking treatment for an injury, according to a small study.

In addition, more men than women presented to the ED with injuries after drinking (69% versus 31%), according to the study presented at the American Public Health Association's annual meeting by David Jernigan, PhD, of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and lead author.

Causes of injuries included violence, car crashes, and even falling off of a ladder. The survey took place only after a physician certified that each patient was sufficiently sober to answer questions that would last for several minutes, using a handheld computerized device that listed various types and brands of alcohol.

Hard liquors were overrepresented among patients with injuries in the ED, considering that beer and other malt beverages have a far larger market share, the authors stated. Liquors including vodka and gin made up about one-third of the total market for alcoholic drinks, but were responsible for nearly 70 percent of hospital visits.

"Vodka was by far the most common liquor to have been consumed by those surveyed, which wasn't surprising because vodka makes up more than 90 percent of the spirits market," said Jernigan.

In a distant second and third were brandy/cognac and gin, which both make up a tiny share of the spirits market, but together were responsible for 20 percent of the total injury visits to the emergency room.

Malt beverages were consumed by about 27 percent of the injury patients who had been drinking.

"These data can point attention to specific beverages and beverage types that are disproportionately problematic within a population," said Jernigan.

He added that the data can help lawmakers determine which beverages to tax at a higher rate in order to curb their use. Another possibility would be to implement bans on widely consumed beverages that lead to higher alcohol-related injury rates and hospitalization, such as malt liquor, he said.

Source: <http://www.medpagetoday.com/tbprint>.

Project Extra Mile is funded by the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety and additional public and private funds. Executive Director: Diane Riibe  
Editors: Cassandra Greisen, Nicole Carritt, Megan Schmitz

# Going the Distance

## Nebraska sees historic low in alcohol-related crashes

In 2010, Nebraska's teen drivers aged 15 to 19 involved in alcohol-related crashes declined by 38 percent from the prior five-year average to the lowest ever recorded, according to the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety.

The good news keeps coming; the DWI criminal conviction rate of 86.5 percent in 2010 was the highest ever recorded in the state. Unfortunately, nearly 17 percent of all those who get DWIs in the state are under the legal drinking age of 21.

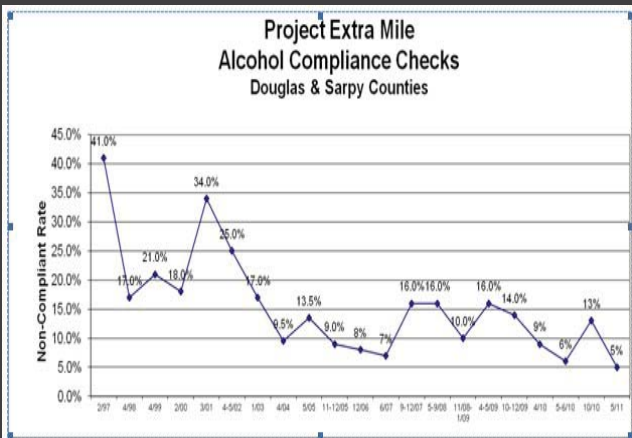
The trend looks optimistic for 2011 considering Nebraska fatalities are eight percent lower than at this same time a year ago.

What's contributing to this success? It's come from the strategic efforts of many who tirelessly work to ensure effective alcohol control policies are adopted and enforced throughout the state.

Over the years, Project Extra Mile has advocated for the adoption of reasonable controls around the sale, distribution and marketing of alcohol and the enforcement of alcohol policies. Most notable are the efforts to prevent youth access to alcohol through compliance checks. With its long-standing law enforcement partnerships, Project Extra Mile has helped coordinate over 11,000 alcohol compliance checks across the state over the years.

The research has proven that compliance checks are one of the most effective tools to reduce youth from accessing alcohol in retail environments. The Nebraska experience has seen the research come to life in the chart below.

"The consistency in which compliance checks are conducted is critical to the effectiveness of the effort," said Diane Riibe, executive director of Project Extra Mile. "The deterrent effect of the checks lasts up to three months, which tells communities they need to do these operations frequently to see the benefit."



# Miles to Go

## The Evolution of alcopops

The battle wages on

After years of protest, the fate of alcopops was determined in February of this year by Lancaster County District Court Judge John Colborn. Judge Colborn ruled that alcopops are distilled spirits under Nebraska law. Distilled spirits are taxed at a rate 12 times higher than beer.

The ruling would help generate an estimated \$2 million in tax revenue annually while increasing the price of the products. The increased price makes alcopops less accessible and less appealing to young people who are both price sensitive and the largest group of consumers of these products.

Days after the ruling, Attorney General Jon Bruning appealed the case and the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on Nov. 3. The alcohol industry's national group, the Flavored Malt Beverages Coalition, filed an amicus brief to join the Attorney General's appeal.

While the appeal process moves on so does the evolution of the alcohol industry's attempts to attract new drinkers. Alcopops have continued to evolve from the merely fruit-flavored, cleverly packaged, youth-friendly products, such as Mike's Hard Lemonade to more dangerous alcoholic energy drinks to the ever-present super-sized products. High-octane products, such as Four Loko and Colt 45 Blast are currently available in stores across Nebraska. These super-sized products contain the equivalent of four-to-five 12-ounce cans of beer in one single 23.5 ounce container and are often priced under \$3.00. These products are currently under investigation by the Federal Trade Commission.

"We thank all those who have provided their support in the effort to appropriately classify alcopops as distilled spirits," said Diane Riibe, executive director of Project Extra Mile. "It's at times like this where we see injustice and our youth being wrongfully targeted that we have to decide if we sit or stand. With courage, a number of Nebraskans chose to stand."



DEC 11

Mission Statement: To create a community consensus that clearly states that underage alcohol use is illegal, unhealthy, and unacceptable.

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Project Extra Mile

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