

Utilizing Compliance Checks to Enforce Youth Alcohol Laws

Preventing Underage Drinking and Youth Access to Alcohol Saves Lives

Illegal sales to minors can be prevented, but communities need valid information in order to do the most effective job of prevention. Compliance checks tell us who is selling to minors and how often, raise community awareness, build support for reducing sales to minors, and inform merchants that they are being monitored by the community. Compliance checks also aid law enforcement and provide data on the impact of prevention strategies.

Why are Compliance Checks Needed?

- The rate of illegal merchant sales in communities has been linked to youth drinking frequency, binge drinking, drinking at school, and drinking and driving.¹
- Media exposure of compliance check operations can serve to “change or reinforce community norms stressing that underage drinking and the sale of alcohol to underage persons are not acceptable behaviors.”²

Compliance Checks Work

- **What are compliance checks?** A compliance check is a tool used to identify licensed alcohol establishments that sell alcohol to underage youth and deter establishments from making future sales to underage patrons. Youth, with parental consent, are trained to conduct compliance checks under the close supervision of a law enforcement officer.
- **How do compliance checks prevent underage drinking?** Compliance checks demonstrate to retailers that the community is serious about reducing illegal sales and preventing underage drinking. The goal is not to penalize retailers, but to ensure licensees utilize good business practices by adequately training and supervising their employees.
- **Studies show that compliance checks are effective.** The National Academy of Sciences recommends compliance checks and mandatory administrative penalties as an effective tool to reduce underage drinking.³ Several studies found that after compliance checks were conducted, sales to underage patrons reduced from 60-80 percent to 25-30 percent.^{4,5}

The Nebraska Experience

Compliance checks are a recommended, evidence-based tool used to prevent youth access to alcohol. Since multi-agency, collaborative compliance checks began in the Omaha metro area in 1997, the percentage of retail outlets cited for selling alcohol to minors has drastically reduced from a high of 41 percent to 9 percent as of 2025. Nebraska’s experience along with the national data and research clearly prove the effectiveness of this important enforcement tool.

- Since 1997, over 16,200 licensed businesses have been checked by law enforcement in the Omaha metro area. These efforts have been conducted in coordination with Project Extra Mile.

¹ Dent, Grube, & Biglan (1995)

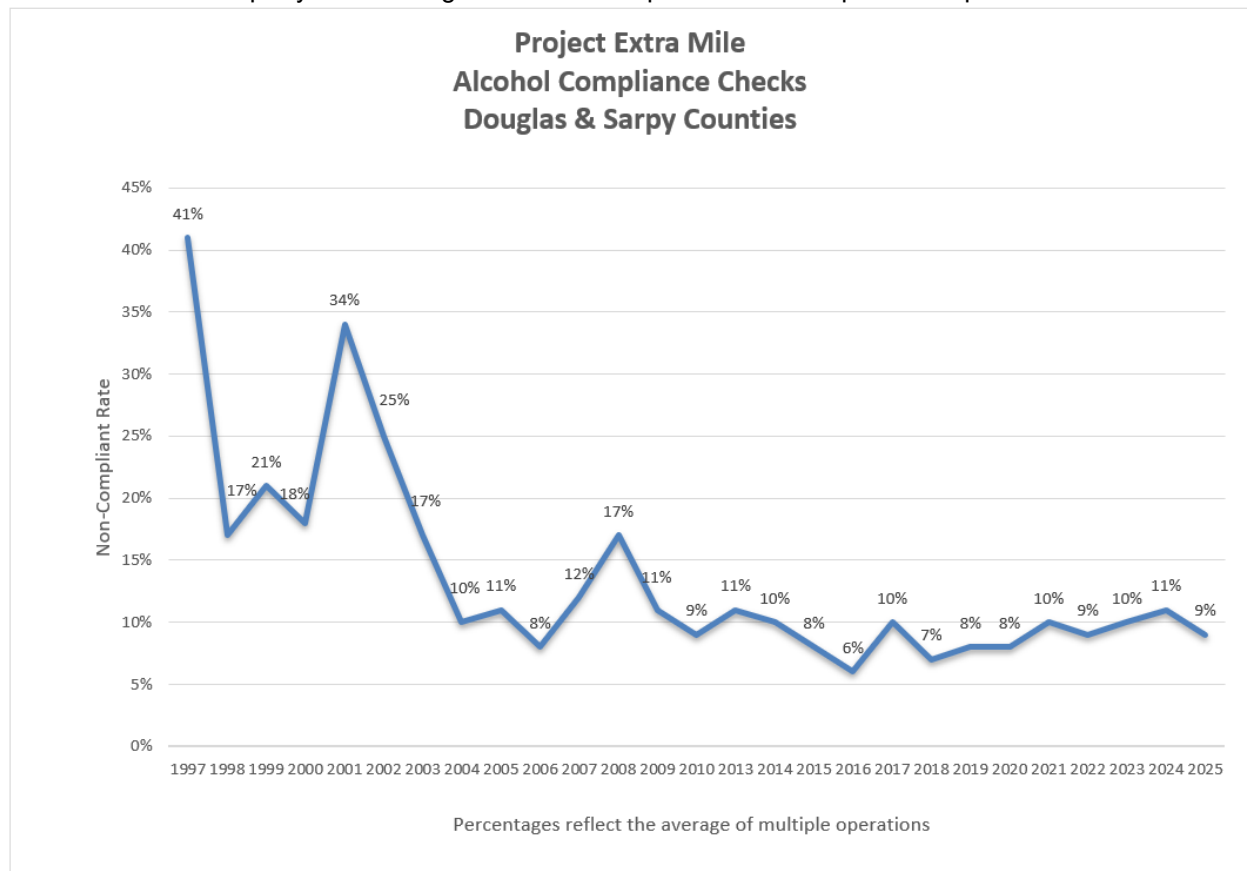
² PIRE (2010)

³ IOM (2003)

⁴ Lewis et al. (1996)

⁵ Preusser, Williams, & Weinstein (2004)

- Over the past 26 years, 95 percent of the compliant businesses have checked and verified ID during compliance checks.
- Project Extra Mile has followed national research recommendations to maintain the deterrent effect by encouraging law enforcement to conduct alcohol compliance checks in waves, at least two or more per year with targeted focus on repeat violators in previous operations.⁶



References

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⁶ Alcohol Epidemiology Program (2000)