



Keeping Your Special Event Festive and Safe

A Planning Guide for Big Bear Lake

Developed by the Institute for Public Strategies - September 2008

Being a resort area that depends on tourism for its economic vitality, Big Bear Lake hosts a variety of special events throughout the year. As alcohol service is often a component, careful planning is needed to ensure that such events remain both enjoyable and safe.

SPECIAL EVENTS IN THE MOUNTAIN REGION

Many special events are held in the Mountain region each year. Among them are Film Festivals, Big Bear Lake Old Miners' Days, Art and Wine Festivals, Oktoberfest and many more. Organized by local chambers of commerce, service clubs and civic groups, such events help maintain the tradition of the Mountain Region and, as they bring tens of thousands of tourists to the region each year, they are essential to the local economy.

While the majority of event participants will act responsibly, the consumption, or potential overconsumption of alcohol can sometimes cause a wide range of problems. In addition to extra clean-up costs, these may include irresponsible, dangerous and sometimes illegal activities. Fights, property damage and DUI-related incidents are just a few examples. Moreover, the easy availability of alcohol at events where youth are present tends to increase the incidents of underage drinking. This can lead to a host of negative consequences, many of which can have long-lasting impact on the individual as well as the community. However, many of these problems can be prevented through careful event planning.

SPECIAL EVENT PLANNING

This planning guide contains event planning strategies developed by experts in the field of hospitality as well as public health. It is intended to provide event organizers, city leaders, enforcement agencies and volunteers with well-tested policies and procedures that can mitigate problems related to alcohol consumption while maintaining a festive spirit of celebration.



Many special events in the Mountain Region, such as the Lake Arrowhead Art and Wine Festival, include alcohol service as an integral part of the event.

Alcohol Availability

The first decision to make when planning an event is whether to include the sale and/or consumption of alcoholic beverages. Contrary to the beliefs of many event organizers, event attendance is not dependent on high alcohol availability. Many people prefer the safe and secure environment that is assured when alcohol is not allowed on the premises. In addition to preventing potential dangers and risks, a decision to hold an alcohol-free event also sends a message to youth participants that alcohol is not necessary to have a good time.

Sponsors for alcohol free events are many and varied. They could include local restaurants, coffee shops, faith based groups and foundations as well as soft drink and bottled water companies.

“Contrary to the beliefs of many event organizers, event attendance is not dependent on high alcohol availability.”

On the other hand, if the decision is made to include alcohol in your event, effectively addressing each of the following components will help mitigate the risks. First and foremost, identify a designated area such as a Beer Garden where this activity will take place. This area should have designated hours of operation and occupant capacity.

Second, take adequate steps to ensure alcohol consumption is limited to this specific area and that no one under the age of 21 is allowed to enter. This would include having volunteers or professional security personnel posted at all entrances and exits to check identification. Such personnel should also ensure that the area does not become overcrowded and that alcohol is not transported to unauthorized areas.

Third, there should be adequate fencing or barriers, no less than six feet in height, surrounding this area. Such fencing should be of chain link or other material that will allow clear visibility of the interior. Appropriate signage should also be placed at the entrance of the Beer Garden.



Thousands attend this alcohol-free celebration which is held annually at a Ventura Community College. Organizers report that attendance has greatly increased since the event went alcohol-free in (date?)

Responsible Beverage Sales & Service

In addition to limiting alcohol consumption to a specific area, organizers should also ensure that those who serve alcoholic beverages are trained in methods of responsible beverage sales and service (RBSS). Such training is designed to help servers identify fake IDs and respond appropriately, recognize situations in which adults are buying alcohol for underage youth, monitor number of drinks consumed and refuse service to those who are intoxicated or underage. It can also help event staff understand liability issues and how to handle problems such as rowdy attendees without undue confrontation.

According to recent research on alcohol sales at community festivals, pseudo-underage and pseudo-intoxicated buyers were able to purchase alcohol at high rates, fifty and eighty nine percent respectively. However, when combined with adequate enforcement, RBSS training has been shown to be effective in changing serving practices and reducing problems such as drinking and driving that result.^{1, 2, 3}

RESPONSIBLE BEVERAGE SALES & SERVICE

Implementing the following RBSS strategies will help ensure that underage drinking and over service of alcohol do not occur at your event.

- Check identification for every alcohol sale and for all customers appearing to be under the age of 30.
- Restrict alcohol sales to a designated location where underage youth are not allowed. Include see-through fencing around the area with security personnel at each entrance and exit.
- Do not sell alcohol at unusually low prices or for a single fee that covers unlimited drinking.
- Limit the number of servings per person per purchase to one (one ID, one beer).
- Limit cup size to 12 ounces for beer and wine coolers and 5 oz. for wine.
- Offer food and non-alcoholic beverages, including non-alcoholic beer.
- Prohibit staff members or volunteers from drinking during the event.
- Provide no alcoholic beverages to anyone appearing to be already intoxicated.
- Intoxicated attendees should be identified and removed from the service area.
- Stop alcohol service at least one hour before the end of the event.
- Make plans using volunteers or local taxi companies to drive home attendees who have had too much to drink.
- Make sure all those who sell or serve alcohol have completed a course in methods of Responsible Beverage Sales and Service. RBSS training is provided by officers from California's Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control.

Sponsorship & Advertising

Since fundraising is the goal of many community events and festivals, it can be tempting for organizers to seek support from the alcohol industry in the form of sponsorships and/or advertising. Depending on the size of the event, manufacturers or distributors of beer, wine and distilled spirits are often willing to sponsor such events, providing financial support in return for promotions and advertising space at the event. Sponsorship agreements may also involve the use of the sponsor's name in conjunction with the event and/or the distribution of promotional items (such as t-shirts, flashlights, etc.) with the sponsor's logo. In some cases alcohol company logos or sym-

bols can be predominant, displayed on large banners or on huge inflatable items to promote a particular brand and product.

Such messages can be highly effective for the alcohol industry in increasing sales, but they can be misleading in that they often fail to mention any of the risks of alcohol consumption. Moreover, since exposure to alcohol advertising has been shown to increase the prevalence of underage drinking, most experts feel that alcohol industry sponsorship is inappropriate for events that youth will be attending.⁴ If funds from alcohol-related businesses are needed to support the event, organizers should consider banning the distribution of alcohol promotional items and limiting the places where signs with an alcohol sponsor's name can be displayed.

“Since alcohol advertising has been shown to increase underage drinking, most experts feel that alcohol sponsorship is inappropriate for events that youth will be attending.”

In addition to regulating the sponsorship of an event, consideration should also be given to how the event is advertised or promoted. As such, organizers should avoid highlighting alcohol consumption as being a key element of the event or associating the name of the event with an alcohol-related business.



The giant beer bottle displayed at the Lakeside Rodeo exposed youth in the crowd to alcohol advertising. It was also clearly visible through a classroom window of a nearby high school.

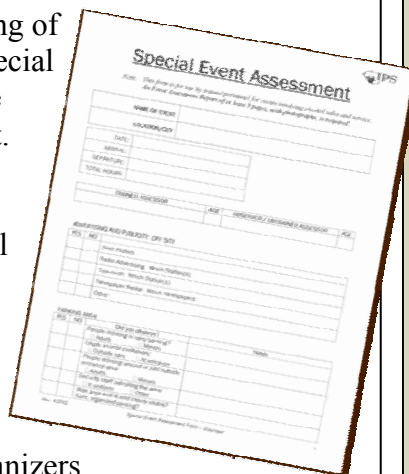
Security & Enforcement

Just as important as having policies and procedures in place is to make sure they are consistently enforced. Event staff should be able to enforce most rules and regulations but having a local police presence can also be helpful, especially at large events. Like alcohol servers, security personnel should have appropriate training and involved in planning for crowd control well in advance of the actual event.

The physical layout of the event site is also an important part of security. This includes making sure there are an adequate number of parking spaces, sufficient lighting, safe walking paths and plenty of signs directing visitors to the festivities. In order to maintain a clean and safe environment, an appropriate number of trash receptacles and adequate restroom facilities should also be maintained.

Assessment & Event Improvement

In addition to planning and training of personnel prior to the event, a Special Event Risk Assessment should be conducted on the day of the event. This would include a thorough evaluation of the physical layout, security arrangements and alcohol serving practices that have been put into place. Advertising and promotional practices can also be reviewed. When conducted by trained personnel, this kind of assessment can give event organizers valuable insight into how well policies and procedures were followed and what kind of changes might be needed for the future. To help ensure that problems are avoided, this kind of assessment should also be completed prior to the event as part of the planning process.



The image shows a 'Special Event Assessment' form from IPS. The form includes sections for 'NAME OF EVENT', 'LOCATION', 'DATE', 'TIME', 'CONTACT PERSON', 'PHONE', 'FAX', 'EMAIL', 'ADDRESS', 'CITY', 'STATE', 'ZIP', 'COUNTY', 'CITY/COUNTY/STATE/ZIP', 'DATE', 'TIME', 'CONTACT PERSON', 'PHONE', 'FAX', 'EMAIL', 'ADDRESS', 'CITY', 'STATE', 'ZIP', 'COUNTY', 'CITY/COUNTY/STATE/ZIP'. It also has a section for 'ASSESSMENT' with a grid for 'RISK FACTOR', 'RISK LEVEL', 'RISK RATING', and 'RISK MITIGATION'. The form is titled 'Special Event Assessment' and has the IPS logo in the top right corner.



Some cities, like Oxnard, require uniformed security or police to be on hand to ensure compliance with sales rules and the safety of guests at special events.

REFERENCES

1. Toomey, T.L., Erickson, D.J., Patek, W., Fletcher, L.A., Wagenaar, A.C., "Illegal alcohol sales and use of alcohol control policies at community festivals," *Public Health Reports*, 2005, vol. 120, n^o2, pp. 165-173
2. Mosher, J.F., Toomey, T., "Evaluating Responsible Beverage Service Programs," *Presentation at the Alcohol Policy XIII Conference*, March 14, 2003
3. Holder, H.D., Wagenaar, A.C., "Mandated server training and reduced alcohol-involved traffic crashes: a time series analysis of the Oregon experience," *Accident; Analysis and Prevention*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 89-97, 1994.
4. L.B. Snyder, F.F. Milici, M. Slater, H. Sun, and Y. Strizhakova, "Effects of Alcohol Advertising Exposure on Drinking Among Youth," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 160 (2006): 18-24.

To request a Special Event Risk Assessment or RBSS training, contact Operation Breakthrough, Inc., P. O. Box 6445, Big Bear Lake, CA 92315 (909) 866-5437.

This issue briefing was adapted from *Keeping Your Special Event Festive and Safe: A Planning Guide for Ventura County Communities*. Institute for Public Strategies and Ventura County Behavioral Health Department.



Institute for Public Strategies

1881 Commercenter East, Suite 138
San Bernardino CA 92408
Phone: (909) 266-1660 / Fax: (909) 266-1634
Email: info@publicstrategies.org