

**ABOUT THE  
MONTANA  
COMMUNITY  
CHANGE  
PROJECT:**

The Montana Community Change Project focuses on preventing drinking and driving and binge drinking by identifying and addressing the physical, social, cultural, economic and political factors that contribute to or maintain alcohol-related problems.

The project is designed to create community conditions and behavioral expectations that make drinking and driving and binge drinking less probable and less acceptable.

Instead of using traditional strategies, such as education and awareness, the Montana Community Change Project uses a proven combination of strategies that includes intentional community organizing, media advocacy, policy development, data collection, and enforcement to create widespread, sustainable changes in communities.

The project is based on the premise that drinking and driving and binge drinking are the product of both individual choices and contextual factors that strongly influence behavior. Therefore, they require a collective response focusing not only on individual behavior, but also on community norms and standards.

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# Responsible Beverage Sales and Service Training: *What Works*

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Prepared by the Institute for Public Strategies for the Montana Community Change Project

## About Responsible Beverage Sales and Service (RBSS) Training

Responsible Beverage Sales and Service (RBSS) training provides information about methods to prevent underage sales and over consumption of alcohol. RBSS training targets on-site alcohol establishments, like bars and restaurants, and off-site outlets selling alcohol to go, such as grocery and convenience stores.

Evidence shows that a combination of RBSS training and enforcement results in reductions in sales to underage persons as well as service to those who are already intoxicated.

But these positive results depend on requiring all managers, check-out clerks and servers to attend RBSS training. These mandatory classes benefit

businesses and staff by boosting job skills and reducing civil liability in case an over-served customer causes a fatal crash or commits an alcohol-related crime. States can prevent these tragedies through a combination of aggressive enforcement and RBSS training. But there is still more that can be done.

Studies show RBSS is most effective when it is part of a comprehensive environmental prevention campaign.

These efforts expand the state's reach to address social sources of alcohol, drink special incentives to binge, and youth-targeted advertising.



## RBSS Training Policies in the United States

As of Jan. 1, 2008, 18 states required mandatory RBSS training, 22 offered voluntary RBSS training, and 16 had no RBSS training. Montana currently offers voluntary RBSS classes, what it calls Responsible Alcohol Sales and Service (RASS) training. For many participants, Montana's RASS program functions a lot like traffic school for those caught speeding. By attending, businesses can expect a reduction in fines or other penalties *after* they've been cited for selling to minors or intoxicated persons. Mandatory RBSS/RASS training aims to prevent violations *before* they occur.

Researchers have identified several variables associated with effective RBSS/RASS training (2). They are outlined in Table 1 on the next page.

## Table 1: Components of Effective RBSS Training

1. **Comprehensive Training.** Effective training should include information on the social impact of alcohol, the impact on the body, local and state laws, techniques for preventing sales to underage persons, how to spot false IDs, pacing drinks, recognizing signs of intoxication, and how to stop serving intoxicated patrons.
2. **Skill Development Opportunities.** The training should include role playing opportunities to develop skills (i.e. checking IDs, cutting off service, dealing with confrontation).
3. **Target Managers and Servers.** The training needs to target managers, sellers and servers of alcohol. Research shows that focusing on managers/licenseses as well as employees increases the effectiveness of RBSS training and compliance with the law. Manager participation in training increases consistency in the application of policy, demonstrates support for the employees, and helps them to develop confidence in applying the training.
4. **Management Policy Development.** Effective training includes providing information about management policy development. RBSS training is more effective if there is a component that helps managers/owners to establish stronger in-house policies (i.e. policies requiring servers to check IDs for anyone under the age of 30, or policies that prohibit drink specials, which encourage patrons to drink more).
5. **Minimum of Four Hours.** The training should last a minimum length of four hours. Shorter trainings cannot cover the topics adequately and still allow for skill building.
6. **Follow Up.** Periodic refresher or booster training helps reinforce knowledge and skills and provides additional support for compliance.
7. **Training is Readily Available.** This mitigates the problem of high turnover of employees, which means some staff do not receive RBSS training at all. Management policy should also provide for interim training on site until the employee is able to attend the training.
8. **Certification and Monitoring.** There should be criteria and procedures in place for certifying and monitoring the training, trainers, and trainees to sustain quality.
9. **Enforcement.** For an RBSS training to be effective, local law enforcement and/or Department of Revenue officers must routinely assess licensee and employee compliance with the law (i.e. do walk-through bar checks, conduct decoy operations, and other compliance checks). See more on this in “Enforcement Plays Critical Role” on the next page.
10. **Media.** In addition, the media must report on law enforcement operations in order for them to be an effective deterrent to would-be violators.

*“Not all RBSS training achieves the goal of reducing sales to minors and service to intoxicated persons.”*

### Components of Model RBSS Legislation

**Based on research, an effective RBSS training policy would:**

- Apply to both on and off-site alcohol outlets.
- Require training and certification of all managers, sellers, and servers.
- Specify minimum components of training.
- Penalize owners/managers as well as sellers/servers for noncompliance.
- Include penalties strong enough to serve as a deterrent (i.e. a graduated fine system with increasing penalties for 2nd and 3rd offenses and suspension for multiple offenses in a specific period).
- Require RBSS training and trainers to be certified by a qualified agency.
- Provide for systemic and regular assessment by law enforcement.
- Call for periodic refresher training.

## Enforcement Plays a Critical Role



For RBSS training to be effective, local law enforcement and/or Department of Revenue officers must routinely assess licensee and employee compliance with the law ( i.e. do walk-through bar checks,

conduct decoy operations, and other compliance checks). In addition, the media must report on law enforcement operations.

Mandatory RBSS training is not enough to ensure success. Numerous studies on the effectiveness of RBSS training show enforcement is essential to policy implementation. The outlet owners, managers, and employees must know about the law and penalties for violations, and that there is an intent to enforce the law. This should include random, unannounced compliance checks (4,5). Furthermore, owners should be notified of the results of compliance checks, both positive and negative.

Passive enforcement, in which police respond only to complaints of violations, is not nearly as effective as active enforcement. Active enforcement includes:

- Compliance checks, typically using an underage person to attempt to purchase alcohol.
- Shoulder-tap operations, where minors ask an adult to buy alcohol for them.
- Bar checks or walk throughs, with police sweeping through a bar to check IDs for sales to minors and to look for other violations.

Furthermore, enforcement activities need to occur on a regular basis; otherwise, the violation rate is likely to rise (6). Better compliance can be expected when businesses know enforcement occurs regularly, visibly and swiftly (3).

It is important for retailers, policy makers, and the public to know enforcement is taking place. Enforcing alcohol laws reinforces community standards that aim to prevent youth access to alcohol and reduce binge drinking. Community groups may work with the police to implement compliance checks, using media advocacy as a tool to publicize enforcement, activities, and outcomes. A number of studies show high visibility enforcement increases compliance (7, 8).

Failing to follow through on violations weakens compliance with the law. Therefore, it is essential that, depending on the penalty structure, the appropriate authorities impose fines and other penalties, document the disposition of cases, and publicize the outcomes. In some cases, law enforcement officials advocate for using administrative instead of criminal penalties since they are faster and cheaper to implement (9).

Finally, lack of resources is often an obstacle to implementing enforcement. One strategy is to provide a mechanism in the RBSS legislation for funding law enforcement activities including administrative costs. The state or community may use a portion of alcohol licensing fees to cover these costs. Fees can be based on the risk associated with the establishment. Risk can be assessed by considering factors such as hours of alcohol sales, volume of alcohol sales, police calls for service, etc.

Table 2 on the next page provides a summary of the elements of an effective enforcement policy.

## Table 2. Characteristics of Effective Enforcement

- Ordinances/legislation include a fee structure to cover enforcement costs.
- Retailers and the community are notified about the law, penalties for violations, and intent to enforce.
- Enforcement is proactive. Rather than depending on complaints regarding violations, law enforcement officials conduct compliance checks, shoulder taps, and bar checks/walk throughs.
- Enforcement activities occur regularly.
- Retailers are notified about results of enforcement activities (both positive and negative) in their establishment.
- The media publicizes the purpose and results of enforcement operations, including naming those in compliance and those who are not.
- Prosecuting attorneys and court officials support enforcement, pursue violations and impose penalties.
- Follow up coverage tracking how alcohol violations are prosecuted.

**T**he Montana Community Change Project uses an Environmental Prevention approach to address binge drinking and drinking and driving among youth and adults. This involves strategies designed to:

- **Reduce youth access to alcohol through retail and social sources.**
- **Encourage alcohol retailers to comply with existing laws that prohibit the sale of alcohol to obviously intoxicated customers.**
- **Reduce youth access to alcohol at community events and binge drinking at community events.**
- **Strengthen the criminal justice system by strengthening laws.**
- **Increase DUI enforcement and Minor In Possession (MIP) laws.**
- **Make enforcement and adjudication of alcohol-related crime more visible.**
- **Encourage the swift and consistent adjudication of alcohol-related offenses.**

For more information about the  
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