



ALCOHOL PURCHASE STUDY*

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UNDERAGE ALCOHOL PURCHASE STUDY*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the sixth alcohol purchase study to determine how easy it is to purchase alcohol without providing legitimate identification. 163 establishments throughout Mecklenburg County were randomly selected from the list of locations permitted to sell alcohol for off premise consumption, excluding ABC stores. Purchase attempts were made between October 19 and December 14, 2009, at 152 locations[†]

Results

The proportion of establishments selling alcohol without checking for identification has consistently decreased since April 2007.

- **25% (38) sold without requiring identification - 8 fewer than the last study**

The percent selling in the previous studies were 39.2%, 41.6%, 42.4%, 36.3%, and 29.7%

- **While not statistically significant, there has been a substantial decrease in the proportion of establishments selling alcohol without asking for identification.**
- **Some clerks ask for identification and then, when one is not provided, none-the-less make sales. This occurred in 10 of the 38 sales made. This needs to be addressed in training.**
- **At least 50% of the attempts were successful in zip codes 28202, 28214, 28211, and 28206.**
 - For 2007/2008 and 2008/2009, zip code 28206 sold over 50% of the time.
- **No establishments in zip codes 28018, 28031, 28036, 28105, 28203, 28204, 28212, 28215, 28270, 28271, and 28280 sold without an ID.**

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[†] 11 stores were either out of business, lost license to sell alcohol, required a membership card for purchase, purchasers did not feel safe entering the establishment or purchasers could not locate.

- There were no differences in the probability of making a purchase by actual age or race of the buyer.
- Differences were found in the probability of making a purchase by gender ($p < .006$).
 - Male 21 of 56 successful purchases (37.5%)
 - Female 17 of 96 successful purchases (17.7%)
- There were no differences in the probability of making a purchase by perceived age of the clerk, clerk's gender or the race/ethnicity of the clerk.

Conclusion

- The checking of identification for the sale of alcohol is increasing as focus on the practice is increasing. However, on average 25% of attempts to purchase alcohol without showing identification are still successful.
- The greatest success has been with drug stores and supermarkets.
- The follow-up responses of store managers have been nearly 100% positive. This type of education is critically important to enable managers to provide adequate training for their employees and to reinforce the community's concern about underage drinking.
- While it is not required by law that sellers of alcohol check for identification under NC §18B-302 (a), it is a defense under sections d(1) and d(2). We suggest that the checking of identification should be considered a "best practice" for retailers to follow.
- There needs to be stronger legislation on the state or local level to require identification in retail sales. Given the resource restraints on alcohol enforcement the community would be well-served if identification was required.
- Establishments in certain zip codes appear to be more lax in requiring identification. An environment scan of these areas and the establishments in them should be conducted to see what may be impacting this difference so that new strategies to address the problem can be developed.

PRIMARY REPORT

Introduction

Underage drinking is, and has been, a central focus of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition. Drinking by underage youth has had considerable attention in the community over the past few years highlighted by a number of auto accident deaths caused by underage drinkers and some deaths of youths from excessive blood alcohol levels.

The Coalition received a grant from the North Carolina Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as part of the coalition's underage drinking initiative. Part of the grant is designed to conduct underage "buys" to monitor the extent to which local establishments adhere to the best practice of requiring age verification by checking for identification before selling.

This project is the sixth study conducted by the Coalition to ascertain the extent to which underage appearing youth can successfully purchase alcohol themselves without showing identification in establishments that sell, but do not serve, alcohol on the premises. One goal of the Coalition is to reduce the availability of alcohol to youth; retail establishments are one means and consistent monitoring of sales provides us empirical evidence any impact our initiatives may have.

Methodology

An absolute random sample of 163 (25.3%) establishments from a total of 644 with Malt Beverage-Off Premise Permits (active and temporary) was initially selected. Attempts were made at 152 establishments - 11 were either out of business, lost their license to sell alcohol, purchasers felt unsafe entering establishment, or purchasers could not locate.

A pool of potential buyers was recruited from students at UNC Charlotte. All students were required to be at least 21 years of age. Each was interviewed and selected if they appeared to be underage. Attempts were made between October and December on every day of the week; however, most (69.8%) were made on Monday and Tuesday. All buy attempts were made between 2 and 11 pm. We suspended purchase attempts during the Thanksgiving holiday. All buyers were asked to buy a 6-pack of a domestic beer without voluntarily offering identification.

The sale was either consummated by the clerk or not. If a sale was made, the alcohol was marked with the name of the establishment and the date and time of the purchase. It was decided that an actual sale would be made to 1) not significantly disrupt the purchase process if legitimate customers were in line, 2) to have a clearly defined "sale" verifying that the identification was not checked and to have "proof" of receipt to provide to managers who consistently requested this information when informed of the sale on the follow-up visit, and 3) to be able to photograph the beer itself for publicity highlighting the ease of sales in the community.

Each establishment was re-visited by a member of the Coalition, but especially members of the 108th Division, National Guard Regional Reserve Command. The follow-up visit involved an interview with the store manager, a certificate of "no sale" for businesses not selling, a review of training options for employees and a packet of stickers highlighting the need to check for identification.

Findings

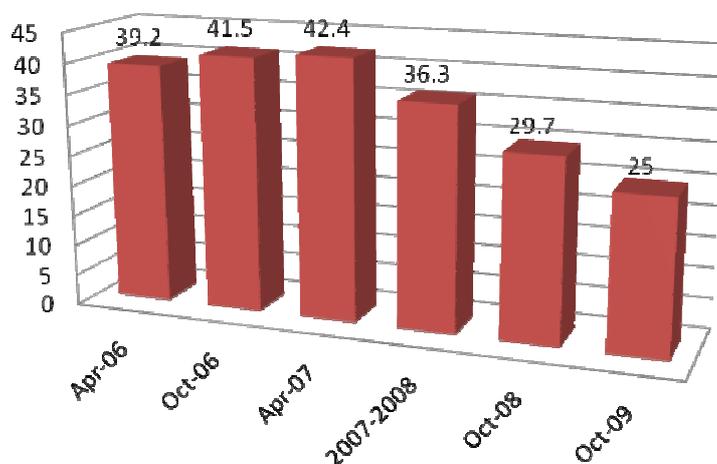
Purchases

- 25% (38) of 152 retail establishments sold without asking for identification.

This is the lowest percent of all the purchase studies and down from the 29.7% of buys during the 2008 study.

These data suggest that in Mecklenburg County the purchase of alcohol by a young person without being checked for identification is possible about 30% of the time.

Percent Total Buys



There were three possible sale outcomes: ID requested - no sale; ID requested, none shown but sale made, and no ID requested at all.

- While representing a small proportion of the sales, some clerks ask for identification and then, when one is not provided, none-the-less make sales. This needs to be addressed in training

Attempt Outcome	April '06	October '06	April '07	2007/2008	October '08	October '09
A sale was made without ID	29 (28.4%)	36 (35.6%)	23 (39.0%)	40 (27.4%)	33 (21.3%)	28 (18.4%)
ID was asked for, none provided, sale anyway	11 (10.8%)	6 (5.9%)	2 (3.4%)	13 (8.9%)	13 (8.4%)	10 (6.6%)
ID asked for, no sale	62 (60.8%)	59 (58.4%)	34 (57.6%)	93 (63.7%)	109 (70.3%)	114 (75%)
Number of Attempts	102	101	59	146	155	152

The most significant change in where sales are most likely is for drug stores and supermarkets. In the first studies, purchases at these types of establishment occurred about 30% of the time. Last year, purchases were made 36.4% of the time for drug stores and 33.3% of the time for supermarkets; this autumn, purchases were made in only 10% of the attempts at drug stores and 4.8% of the attempts at supermarkets. Another significant change in where sales are most likely is for convenience stores with no gas. While sales were high during the first two years of the study, they greatly decreased in October 2008. While still lower than previous years (excluding October 2008), October 2009 experienced an increase in sales in convenience stores with no gas.

	2006	2007/2008	October 2008	October 2009
Convenience Store – No gas	61.5%	50.0%	15.4%	42.1%
Convenience Store – with gas	41.1%	35.5%	33.8%	29.3%
Drug Stores	21.4%	33.3%	36.4%	10.0%
Supermarkets	29.4%	30.6%	33.3%	4.8%

ZIP codes

There are observable differences by zip codes. The following shows the number and percent of sales by zip code for the 2009 project. Of the 152 attempts, overall, 25% sold without an ID check and 75% did not sell.

Purchases over 50% of attempts

Zip Code		Sale		Total
		No Sale	Sale	
28211	Count	1	4	5
	% within Zip	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
28206	Count	1	3	4
	% within Zip	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
28202	Count	2	2	4
	% within Zip	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
28214	Count	2	2	4
	% within Zip	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

Purchases 20-45% of attempts

Zip Code		Sale		Total
		No Sale	Sale	
28208	Count	8	5	13
	% within Zip	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
28209	Count	3	2	5
	% within Zip	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
28273	Count	7	3	10
	% within Zip	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
28207	Count	2	1	3
	% within Zip	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
28210	Count	7	3	10
	% within Zip	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
28227	Count	3	1	4
	% within Zip	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
28262	Count	3	1	4
	% within Zip	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
28269	Count	3	1	4
	% within Zip	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
28205	Count	11	3	14
	% within Zip	78.6%	21.4%	100.0%
28217	Count	4	1	5
	% within Zip	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
28078	Count	9	2	11
	% within Zip	81.8%	18.2%	100.0%

Purchases less than 10% of attempts

		Sale		Total
		No Sale	Sale	
28226	Count	5	1	6
	% within Zip	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
28213	Count	6	1	7
	% within Zip	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
28227	Count	7	1	8
	% within Zip	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
28216	Count	8	1	9
	% within Zip	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%

Purchases 0% of attempts

28203	Count	2	0	2
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
28204	Count	3	0	3
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
28212	Count	2	0	2
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
28215	Count	4	0	4
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
28031	Count	3	0	3
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
28036	Count	2	0	2
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
28105	Count	5	0	5
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
28270	Count	1	0	1
	% within Zip	100.0%	.0%	100.0%

Buyer Characteristics

There were no differences in the probability of making a successful purchase by actual age or race of the buyer. However, there was a difference in the probability of making a successful purchase based on the gender of the buyer. Males were more successful at purchasing alcohol without an ID than females were.

- **Male** **21 of 56 successful purchases (37.5%)**
- **Female** **17 of 96 successful purchases (17.7%)**

Clerk Characteristics

There were no differences in the probability of making a successful purchase based on the perceived age of the clerk, clerk's gender or clerk's race/ethnicity.

Follow-up [Awaiting completion of the follow-up trips]

Each establishment was re-visited by a member of the Coalition, but especially members of the 108th Division, National Guard Regional Reserve Command. The follow-up visit involved an interview with the store manager, a certificate of "no sale" for businesses not selling, a review of training options for employees and a packet of stickers highlighting the need to check for identification.

Conclusion

- The checking of identification for the sale of alcohol is increasing as focus on the practice is increasing but on average 25% of attempts to purchase alcohol without showing identification are still successful. This is good news and suggests that the

concerted efforts by the Coalition and the community are beginning to have an impact.

- More needs to be done since purchases are still possible about 25% of the time.
- The greatest success has been with drug stores and supermarkets.
- While convenience stores that do not sell gas experienced a drastic decrease in sales in October 2008, the success was short lived. Attempts to purchase alcohol without an ID at convenience stores that do not sell gas were successful 41.2% of the time.
- The follow-up meetings with managers have been nearly 100% positive. This type of education is critically important to enable managers to provide adequate training for their employees and to reinforce the community's concern about underage drinking.
- While it is not required by law that sellers of alcohol check for identification under NC §18B-302 (a), it is a defense under sections d(1) and d(2). We suggest that the checking of identification should be considered a "best practice" for retailers to follow.
- There needs to be stronger legislation on the state or local level to require identification in retail sales. Given the resource restraints on alcohol enforcement the community would be well-served if identification was required.
- Establishments in certain zip codes appear to be more lax in requiring identification. An environment scan of these areas and the establishments in them should be conducted to see what may be impacting this difference so that new strategies to address the problem can be developed.

