

# ENVIRONMENTAL PREVENTION

Environmental Prevention involves changing the environment in which alcohol-related problems (such as drinking and driving, binge drinking, and underage drinking) occur. But what does it mean to “change the environment?” One way to explain the concept of Environmental Prevention is to first identify what it is **not**:

- It is **not** focused on changing individual behavior(s) through education and treatment.
- It is **not** “prohibition” of alcohol in the community.
- It is **not** condemning those who drink or sell alcohol responsibly.
- It is **not** eliminating personal responsibility for those whose behavior causes damage or injury to others.

Instead, the Environmental Prevention approach works to modify community conditions that condone and/or encourage unhealthy and unsafe behaviors.

Environmental Prevention requires a new way of thinking on the part of prevention professionals. In this case it involves:

- Rejecting the assumption that, “We can’t change things because this is how it is, and always will be!”
- Critically examining those aspects of our society that support or sustain alcohol-related problems.
- A willingness to do things differently.
- Insisting that policy makers and law enforcement work together with community groups so changes will have significant and sustainable effects on the problem.
- Holding accountable all those who profit from irresponsible alcohol sales and use.
- Supporting those responsible for making and enforcing alcohol-related laws/policies.
- No longer solely blaming kids for underage drinking and related problems.

Ultimately, Environmental Prevention is based on the fact that people’s behavior is powerfully shaped by their environment. Environmental Prevention considers four areas of concern or causal factors: social availability of alcohol, retail availability of alcohol, criminal justice, and promotion of alcohol.

Just look at the change in public attitudes toward seatbelts and smoking. Environmental Prevention Campaigns related to both these issues have created a dramatic cultural shift in thinking and behavior that has had a positive effect on public health and safety throughout the United States.

**Environmental Prevention targets entire communities rather than individuals. That way, it has the potential to bring about enduring reductions in the problems. Still, it is not a quick fix; it may require several years or even a generation to see the changes occur, but these changes are generally permanent and dramatic.**

