

Sales of Liquor Miniatures

Sales of single serving containers of alcohol, known as “miniatures,” contribute to two important community problems: litter and alcohol abuse. A ban on miniatures would reduce the amount of litter cluttering our streets, trails and parks. In addition, a miniature ban may reduce some forms of alcohol abuse, leading to a cleaner, healthier and safer environment.

Local Environmental Scan Results, March 2015

- *On March 17 the Student Wellness Action Team (SWAT) from Santa Fe High School did an environmental scan, picking up single serving alcoholic beverage bottles or “miniatures” near their high school.*
- *Twelve 2.5 gallon plastic bags full of miniatures were collected.*
- *Collection took place on a 1.5 miles stretch of Siringo Road, between Yucca Street and Richards Avenue. In addition to the high school, this area is home to a middle school and an elementary school as well as a neighborhood park and residences.*



SWAT members picking up miniature bottles near Santa Fe High School. March 2015

Impact on Litter

Litter is a widespread problem in communities. Trash often piles up on roadways, gutters, sidewalks, and streetscapes, with no one clearly responsible for cleaning it up. Although there are no formal studies documenting the extent to which miniature liquor bottles contribute to litter, informal reports and observations indicate that these bottles are special part of the litter problem. Since many people purchase them to consume while driving and it is illegal to have an open or empty alcoholic beverage container in a vehicle, drivers generally throw the empty bottles out of the window. Items like fast food wrappers, large drink cups and other trash that are legal to keep in a vehicle often stay there, instead of being thrown out as litter.

Relationship Between Alcohol Abuse and Violence

Sales of single serving containers of alcohol are related to the amount of violence around outlets. The findings of a landmark study done in California 2011 suggest that a ban on single serve container sales would reduce violence in surrounding areas.ⁱ

Impact on Alcohol Abuse and Underage Drinking

When people, especially our youth, see these small liquor bottles on the ground where they walk and play, there is an impact on social norms. The message that is conveyed is that alcohol use is widespread and acceptable, a community norm that contributes to underage drinking and other alcohol problems.

What Can We Do About Sales of Single Service Alcohol Containers?

In Our Community

Communities can prohibit the sale of miniatures as a litter control measure, solving an important litter issue.

Encourage Retail Leadership

Alcohol establishments can be encouraged to voluntarily refrain from sales of single service alcohol containers, following the lead of CVS Caremark.

Consumption of miniatures likely contributes to DWI. People who buy miniatures often purchase them for immediate consumption; in parking lots, while walking down the street and while driving. Since open containers of alcohol are illegal, these little bottles tend to be tossed out of a vehicle window after being consumed while driving. When they are sold at convenience stores located in gas stations, the likelihood of someone jumping in their vehicle and drinking them while driving is increased.

Miniatures are easy to conceal, easy to dispose of and cheap. These qualities may lead them to contribute to underage drinking. Underage drinkers report that they can hide them from adults and sneak them into places like proms or concerts. Youth also say that they are easy to steal because of their small size.

Miniatures are generally cheap, which make them more attractive to people who ask others for money to buy a “shooter” or a “mini.” Raising the barrier (in this case, price) for purchasing alcohol may discourage panhandling near liquor establishments.



A small sample of litter found near a liquor store in Santa Fe, New Mexico 2015.

Recommendations for Controlling Sales of Miniatures

Communities who are concerned about the impact of miniatures can consider several ways to restrict sales. One option is to adopt a ban on sales of all single serving containers of alcohol under their jurisdiction as a litter control measure. Another option is restrict sales in a land use overlay zone. Communities can also consider working with retail outlets to adopt voluntary restrictions on sales of miniatures. A community study of the environmental impact of miniatures on litter as well as alcohol-related problems such as DWI and violence can help determine which approach will best address community needs.

References:

ⁱ (Parker, RN, et al, The impact of retail practices on violence: The case of single serve alcohol beverage containers. Drug Policy Review, 2011; 30:496-504).