

**FACT SHEET: DECOY SHOULDER TAP****DECOY SHOULDER TAP PROGRAM****Introduction**

When the California Supreme Court ruled in 1994 that minor decoys could be used by law enforcement to check whether stores were selling alcohol to minors (persons under age 21), the violation rate was nearly 50 percent. In some cities, almost one out of every two stores failed to check a minor's age and sold them alcohol. In 1997 the violation rate had dropped to less than 10 percent in those cities that used the Minor Decoy Program on a regular basis. Minors then turned to the "shoulder tap" method of getting alcohol by standing outside of a liquor store or market and asking adults to buy them alcohol. A survey conducted by the Los Angeles Police Department indicated that as much as 46 percent of all minors who attempt to acquire alcohol use this method.

The Decoy Shoulder Tap Program is an enforcement program that ABC and local law enforcement agencies use to detect and deter shoulder tap activity. During the program, a minor decoy, under the direct supervision of law enforcement officers, solicits adults outside ABC licensed stores to buy the minor decoy alcohol.

Any person seen furnishing alcohol to the minor decoy is arrested (either cited or booked) for furnishing alcohol to a minor (a violation of Section 25658(a) Business and Professions Code).

**Goals**

1. To reduce underage consumption of alcohol and over consumption (binge drinking) by deterring adults through education and enforcement from furnishing to minors outside of stores.
2. To expand the involvement of all law enforcement agencies through training/technical assistance and printed material in enforcing underage drinking laws.
3. To increase public awareness through PSA, news media and printed material relating to adults who furnish alcohol to minors.
4. To provide printed materials to all law enforcement agencies for distribution within communities statewide.

**Program Components**

Program components include the following:

- **IDENTIFY LOCATIONS OF ACTIVITY.** Officers collect and review complaints and information provided by citizens, parents, school officials, patrol/campus police officers, community groups, and special event organizers who cater to high school age students. Officers review all data and evidence to help plan the program.
- **GAIN PROGRAM SUPPORT.** In addition to needing support from the community as described above, the program needs strong support by the local prosecutor. Therefore, law enforcement agencies are encouraged to discuss the benefits of the program with their city attorney or county district attorney.
- **COORDINATE THE INVESTIGATION.** The Decoy Shoulder Tap Program initially can be conducted as a joint operation between ABC and the local law enforcement agency. After the initial training by ABC, the program is normally used by the local law enforcement agency.
- **MEDIA INVOLVEMENT.** One of the most effective uses of the media is to publicize enforcement. Therefore, a press release announcing the program and its goals and objectives is issued to the local news media. Since many adults are not aware of the seriousness of the offense, the publicity of those arrested sends a strong message to those who may be inclined to assist a minor in getting alcohol.
- **DECOY SELECTION.** Selection of the minor decoy is critical. Desirable qualifications include being: under 20 years of age (and appearing that age); truthful; willing to work undercover and wear a radio transmitter; comfortable making a face-to-face identification of the suspect after the violation and to have their photograph taken with the suspect; able to prepare a written report; willing to testify in court; and willing to undergo media attention.

## **Evaluation**

The University of California, Berkeley, Institute for the Study of Social Change (ISSC) has evaluated the Decoy Shoulder Tap Project.

## **Contact Information**

Additional information may be obtained by contacting:

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