

Are you concerned about alcohol advertising and signs at local alcohol outlets?

Communities often describe the many negative effects of alcohol outlets in their neighbourhoods. Commonly, concerns are raised about the exteriors being painted in big, bold, bright colours, with numerous large signs and posters commonly advertising alcohol brands, products and discounted product prices. Outside the shop-front may be an array of sandwich boards and flags cluttering the landscape, contributing to what communities call “visual pollution”, an “eyesore”, or a “blight”. Residents are rightly concerned that the advertisements contribute to the normalisation of alcohol in their neighbourhood, especially harming children when they are close to schools. Concerns are often greatest in relation to liquor stores, but may also relate to pubs and bars in the neighbourhood.

There are steps you can take to address signs and advertising at alcohol outlets. The steps depend on whether you are concerned about the size and number of signs on/outside a building, the promotions shown in the advertisements, or other aspects of content of the advertising are considered problematic.

Why you should take action

Alcohol advertising is harmful to all ages. The more alcohol advertising a young person sees, the greater the likelihood that they will start drinking at an earlier age and drink more heavily.^{1,2} Exposure to alcohol advertising has been established as a cause of youth drinking.³

The pervasiveness of alcohol advertising in our environment shapes and reinforces a young person’s perception that using alcohol is a normal, harmless, fun, everyday behaviour. Harm from alcohol advertising extends to persons with alcohol use disorders (including dependence), for whom advertising drives psychological cues and triggers to drink, making it harder to remain sober or cut back on drinking.⁴

We also know that the presence of large obtrusive alcohol advertisements on and/or outside shop-fronts can dominate neighbourhood environments. They can be a blight on community landscapes, reducing the amenity and pleasantness of an area and negatively impacting community wellbeing and a sense of neighbourhood pride.⁵

Less alcohol advertising, less harm

International research on alcohol signage at licensed premises has found a number of associations with negative outcomes, including youth intention to use alcohol,⁶ higher prevalence of binge drinking,⁷ and increased violent crime.⁸

New Zealand research⁹ from the University of Otago found more than half (52%) of children’s exposure to alcohol advertising was from advertising outside the home. Shop-front signage accounted for up to 30% of all alcohol

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marketing exposures, while alcohol signs (including billboards, sandwich boards, posters, etc.) accounted for nearly 10% of exposures. Tamariki Māori had alcohol marketing exposures that were five times greater than New Zealand European children, and Pacific children had exposure levels that were three times greater. The inequity in alcohol advertising exposure is clearly inconsistent with Te Tiriti principles of active protection.

Signs and advertising at alcohol outlets are an important contributor to the total volume of alcohol advertisements that New Zealanders see every day. As there are more liquor outlets in our most deprived communities¹⁰, there is therefore more risk of harm from exposure to alcohol advertising.

1. Concerns about the content of alcohol advertising at alcohol outlets

If you are concerned about the images, wording, or promotion of alcohol within the content of alcohol advertisements, you can take the steps outlined below. If you can, take a photo of the advertising for your records.

STEP ONE. MAKE A COMPLAINT UNDER THE ALCOHOL ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION CODE

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has a voluntary industry Code that applies to all forms of alcohol advertising. You can make a complaint to the ASA if you are concerned about the way that alcohol is being advertised. For example, you may feel an advertisement is socially irresponsible, promotes excessive drinking, or appeals to kids.

You may also be concerned about where an alcohol advertisement is located or placed in your neighbourhood. Rule 1(a), Guideline 6 of the Code states that alcohol advertising and promotion may only be placed in locations where 80% or more of the expected average audience should be adults. Also, advertisers must not place alcohol advertisements or promotion on fixed sites within a 300-metre sightline of the main entrance to a primary, intermediate or secondary school. Advice on making complaints can be found on our website Actionpoint.org.nz under Advertising and Sponsorship.



STEP TWO. MAKE A COMPLAINT AGAINST SECTION 237 (IRRESPONSIBLE PROMOTION OF ALCOHOL) OF THE SALE AND SUPPLY OF ALCOHOL ACT 2012

Section 237 of our alcohol laws targets anything that encourages people to consume alcohol to an excessive extent and/or promotes alcohol in a way that has special appeal to minors. If you have concerns about advertisements promoting alcohol irresponsibly, you can contact your local council's alcohol licensing inspectors or the Police Alcohol Harm Reduction Officers.

2. Concerns about alcohol advertising at alcohol outlets close to schools

Children deserve to be protected from alcohol advertisements, especially on their journey to and from school. There are two steps you can take to help protect kids.

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STEP TWO. REQUEST THAT ADVERTISING CONDITIONS BE PLACED ON THE OUTLET'S LICENCE TO SELL ALCOHOL

Any new alcohol outlet will need a licence to sell alcohol and existing outlets need to get their licence renewed on a regular basis. If you live in close proximity (generally within 2km) to a liquor outlet, you can object to a new or renewal alcohol licence application, requesting conditions be placed on the licence that restricts the amount of advertising and signage permitted.

For example, in a licensing decision (NZ ARLA 123, 2021) for a bottle store within 500m of two schools, the following conditions were imposed:

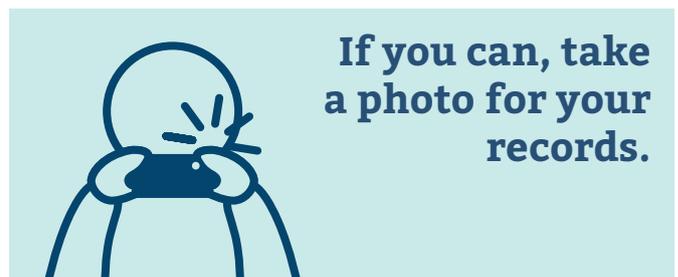
- (i) Signage shall be limited to displaying the store name and logo on the existing roof display;
- (ii) No bright colours shall be used in the external decoration of the premises;
- (iii) No specific product or price specials shall be displayed externally; and
- (iv) No external advertising shall be displayed by way of flags or sandwich boards outside the store.

3. Concerns about signs offering large discounts on alcohol or free alcohol

You may be concerned that signs are promoting large discounts on the price of alcohol. We know that when alcohol is cheap, more alcohol is purchased and consumed, leading to a higher risk of harm.

STEP ONE. MAKE A COMPLAINT AGAINST SECTION 237 (IRRESPONSIBLE PROMOTION OF ALCOHOL) OF THE SALE AND SUPPLY OF ALCOHOL ACT 2012

Section 237 of our alcohol laws also targets alcohol outlets advertising alcohol that is free of charge, or advertising that is seen or heard outside the premises for alcohol discounted by more than 25%. If you have concerns about advertisements showing discounts and promotions, you can contact your local council's alcohol licensing inspectors or the Police Alcohol Harm Reduction Officers. If you can, take a photo for your records.



4. Concerns about the size and number of signs at alcohol outlets

STEP ONE. LOOK AT THE RULES IN ANY RELEVANT SIGNAGE BYLAW

Some councils, like Auckland, have a bylaw in place that controls what signs can be displayed at premises – these controls are not specific to alcohol outlets, vary depending which District Plan/Unitary Plan zone the outlet is located in, and are subject to exemptions. For example, the basic requirements in Auckland's proposed Signs Bylaw are that window signs cover no more than 50% of the height, and no more than 50% of the width of windows, that wall mounted signs are limited in number and do not exceed 3sqm, and that there be no signs above verandas. There are also limits on the number, size, and placement of portable signs such as sandwich boards and flags. If your Council does not have a Signs Bylaw, encourage them to develop one. If your Council has a Bylaw, you can make a complaint to the Council outlining your concerns.



STEP TWO. LOOK AT THE RULES IN ANY RELEVANT DISTRICT OR UNITARY PLAN

Whilst many councils will not have a bylaw relating to signs, all councils are required to have a District or Unitary Plan that sets out rules for land use. Some of these District or Unitary Plans will include requirements for signs and billboards. Awareness of requirements is likely to be low among community members and licensees alike, and using a District Plan to manage advertising may be new for council officers. Wellington, Porirua, and Kāpiti Coast District Plans all have some form of regulation of signage, including signs not permitted to cover windows (Wellington, business areas), not exceeding one square metre (Porirua, suburban zone), and not covering 20% of wall or window area (Kāpiti Coast). Again, contact your Council if you have any concerns.

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Want to create change to improve the amenity of your community and reduce harm?

You may consider joining a community group that seeks to limit the harm from alcohol – some of these groups are actively working to object to alcohol licence applications in their neighbourhood. By participating in the licensing process, you may be able to influence the inclusion of advertising and signage conditions on the alcohol licence.

Get together with leaders in your community and talk to your local representatives about getting better protections in place. This might be to your local councillors or local/community board members about getting better protections in a Signage Bylaw or District Plan, and making it a priority for Council officers to improve compliance with existing controls. You may want to talk to a Member of Parliament about your concerns with alcohol advertising and the need for communities to be better protected through adoption of effective national laws. You could also express your concerns to Government Ministers.



Photo: Justin Latif / The Spinoff

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