

FIRST EUROPEAN  
NETWORK CONFERENCE ON

# REDUCING YOUTH DRINKING BY LAW ENFORCEMENT



## Minutes of the European Alcohol Law Enforcement Network Conference 27-28 October 2012 in Rotterdam

On October 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 2011, the first European conference on alcohol law enforcement took place in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The conference was focused on one of the key success factors for each alcohol policy: Bridging the gap between health policy makers and the enforcement experts. The aim of the conference was to disseminate and exchange practical and scientific knowledge on alcohol law enforcement. About 100 experts from 11 different countries met each other and visited presentations from different experts. Four countries were selected to present their national enforcement policy. From Sweden, The Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK, enforcement experts took part in a group interview led by Jos Wiene, the Mayor of Katwijk (figure 1). Key note speaker of the day was prof. Alexander Wagenaar from the University of Florida.

On the second day a group of 35 international participants shared their experiences and knowledge in smaller network groups and discussed about the value of an European network on alcohol law enforcement. In this summary we will try to catch the main headlines of both days. We also try to give an overview on the legal framework regarding to youth drinking in the European countries.



Figure 1: Group interview by the chair Mayor Jos Wiene

### Law enforcement in the Netherlands

After being welcomed in Rotterdam by city Board member Hugo de Jonge, Afke van Rijn (the Director of Safety and Administration at the Ministry of Security and Justice) spoke about the law enforcement situation in the Netherlands:

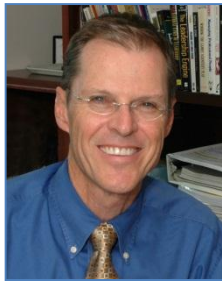
*“Alcohol policy in the Netherlands becomes more and more a matter of local government. The issue of permits, health programs and public safety are all municipal matters. But unlike in many other countries, the enforcement of alcohol legislation is not carried out by the municipal authority or the local police.*

*In the Netherlands, the supervision and enforcement of alcohol regulations is in the hands of a national authority, the VWA (Food and Safety Authority). The capacity of this authority is limited. On*

average, supervisors of the VWA visit alcohol suppliers once every two to three years. And working for a national authority, they have only limited knowledge of specific local problems. That is why a few years ago local governments requested the national government to transfer the enforcement of alcohol regulations to the municipal level. Under the new Licensing and Catering Act this request will be granted, which implies that in the near future most tasks of the Food and Safety Authority will be carried out by local enforcers”.

### Research on alcohol law enforcement

Especially in the US, a lot of research has been done on the influence of the enforcement of alcohol legislation on underage drinking. Professor Wagenaar illustrated with different US studies that the impact of the 21 age limit in the US has dropped underage drinking significantly. Remarkable is that the 21 age limit had also effect in states where the law was not enforced. Only the regulation itself showed effectiveness.



Prof. wagenaar

Law enforcement is a tool to strengthen the effect of the alcohol policy. The effect of enforcement is twofold according to prof. Wagenaar: “Enforcement effects the direct availability of alcohol to adolescents and it influences the norms, attitudes and beliefs about the product in society”.

Availability and social norms/attitudes both are strong predictors of behavior (figure 2).

Wagenaar explained that the effect of enforcement on compliance in bars (on premise) is temporarily. After an enforcement action a general seller of alcohol is 17% more likely to comply with the law. After two months this effect drops to less than 10%. For supermarkets (off-premise) there even is now long term effect of enforcement. With those scientific results prof. Wagenaar showed that enforcement is effective but must be a structural part of any alcohol policy.



Figure 2: Double role of alcohol law enforcement

### Age limits in Europe

The legal age limits for selling alcohol are a corner stone of most alcohol policies in Europe. The countries that had a prominent role during the conference (NL, SE, UK and CH) confirmed that the enforcement of the age limits is an import part of the enforcement work.

Age limits differ by country (table 1). The age limit of 18 is used most frequently in Europe, but the limits vary from 16 up to 20. Most countries use different age limits for on- and off-premise sales of alcohol. Also the type of beverage (% of alcohol) has consequences for the age limits in many countries.

During the conference it became clear that several countries like the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland use mystery shoppers to evaluate the compliance of the age limits by alcohol sellers. The use of minor decoy’s, like they do in the US, is not used in Europe so far.

Country	Off-premise Beer and wine	Off-premise distilled	On-premise beer and wine	On-premise distilled
Denmark	16	16	18	18
Germany	16	18	16	18
Finland	18	20	18	18
Netherlands	16	18	16	18
Poland	18	18	18	18
Sweden	20	20	18	18
UK	18	18	18	18

Table 1: Age limits in EU countries

### Organization of enforcement

Like the age limits, also the organization of enforcement differs per country. Where in the Netherlands a national authority is responsible for alcohol law enforcement (although this will change in 2012), it is a local responsibility in most other European countries. On the local level it is mostly the police that is involved, but there are also municipal inspectors that perform age limit and license inspections.

The Dutch Food and Safety Authority developed a team of so called 'weekend poolers' consisting of students that support the inspectors during their work. For student it is easier to enter bars and clubs without being recognized. With this method it is easier to observe violation of the age limits for selling alcohol.

An interesting point of discussion that returned many times is the use of mystery shoppers within the enforcement strategy. In most countries it is only allowed to use mystery shoppers for research purposes. Yet, some countries would like to have the possibility to integrate them in the enforcement activities. As an interim solution 'weekend poolers' could be an option, but there are perhaps more possibilities. This topic definitely will be continued in the coming years.

### Future of the network

On the last conference day a group of 35 international guests exchanged their experiences on alcohol law enforcement in a so-called 'small kitchen table setting'.

Enforcement experts from Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK were asked to organise such a meeting. At the end of the conference it became clear that exchanging practices and knowledge in this policy field is very useful and should be continued. The group agreed that there should be a following up conference next year. STAP will take the initiative to organise this event again in collaboration with the new network on alcohol law enforcement. The following topics were mentioned for the program of next year's conference:



- The role of mystery shopping in the enforcement strategy.
- Enforcement regarding over-serving and public drunkenness
- The policy context of enforcement (pricing-, marketing-, availability of alcohol, national policies)
- System of punishment & penalties
- Educating/training the enforcement officers (better indicators of training)

We all look back on a very informative and practical conference with motivated and experienced speakers and participants. This first alcohol law enforcement conference, that was made possible with support of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, also was a test to discover if an active network on this topic is useful and desired. The conclusion is definitely yes. At the moment we are already working on next year's meeting that probably will take place in November 2012 in Stockholm (Sweden). As soon as we know more about this conference you will hear about us. If you have any suggestions for us for next year, please let us know!

### More information

For more information about this conference and/or future plans, please contact Joost Mulder from STAP. [jmulder@stap.nl](mailto:jmulder@stap.nl)

*Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy*  
[www.stap.nl](http://www.stap.nl)