



Statement alcohol marketing by STAP (initiator of EUCAM) November 2009

STAP (the Foundation for Alcohol Prevention in the Netherlands) is a national, independent non-profit organisation that advocates effective alcohol control policies and works towards public awareness of the risks of alcohol. STAP is a member of Eurocare, the European Alcohol Policy Alliance. STAP has been monitoring the alcohol marketing in the Netherlands for several years (commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports). Consequently, we have gained a lot of knowledge about the functioning of alcohol marketing regulations. STAP has initiated EUCAM (the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing)¹ in which dissemination of impact research on the effects of alcohol marketing is supported and systematic monitoring of alcohol marketing stimulated. EUCAM has a large network of researchers, representatives of NGOs and policymakers who are informed on developments in alcohol marketing. EUCAM contact persons in more than 15 European countries are active in disseminating news on alcohol marketing (regulations). From 2009, systematic monitoring of alcohol marketing will be implemented in five European countries (supported by the AMMIE project, co-funded by the European Commission).

We would like to thank the WHO for the opportunity to share our views and experiences about alcohol marketing regulations.

Need for alcohol marketing regulation

Longitudinal studies consistently show a modest but significant effect of exposure to alcohol marketing on adolescents' alcohol consumption. Adolescents who are exposed to a higher volume of alcohol marketing are more likely to start drinking alcohol earlier, to drink more frequently and to drink higher amounts of alcohol during one occasion. Exposure to alcohol marketing practices that are perceived as attractive by youngsters increase the effect of exposure to alcohol marketing on drinking behaviour.

The first step is to reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertisements that young people perceive as attractive. Alcohol beverage marketers often claim to target young adults (e.g. age 18-24). Minors look up to this age group and are attracted to similar elements and themes in alcohol advertisements. Attractive elements are for example: the use of celebrities, popular music and humour. To protect young people against attractive advertisements, these themes should be restricted in alcohol marketing regulations.

More importantly, alcohol marketing regulations should be focused on the restriction of the volume of alcohol marketing.

Restrictions of the volume of alcohol marketing to which young people are exposed can have different forms and can be implemented in various degrees. Although partly bans (for example a time ban on TV) can decrease the total volume of alcohol marketing practices, substitution effects are a large problem: if broadcasting advertising is

¹ EUCAM is supported by the following NGOs: STAP (the Netherlands), Actis (Norway), AV OG TIL (Norway), IOGT-NTO (Sweden), Danish Alcohol Policy Network (Denmark), Eurocare Italia (Italy), PARPA (Poland).

restricted, a shift to other types of marketing is expected. For this reason, and because of the difficulty of monitoring the audiences reached by less traditional alcohol marketing tools, a total ban of alcohol marketing is preferred.

Alcohol marketing regulations should address not only alcohol advertising in traditional media, but also alcohol advertising and promotion by non-traditional tools. Longitudinal studies show for example that exposure to promotional merchandise of alcohol brands has a relatively large impact on drinking behaviour of youth compared to the effect of exposure to alcohol marketing in more traditional media. Although challenging, marketing forms as viral marketing, event sponsoring, product placement and price marketing need to be addressed in alcohol marketing regulations and monitoring of alcohol marketing. The cumulative effect of alcohol marketing exposure emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive alcohol marketing regulation.

Statutory regulations should be emphasized, since there is increasing evidence that self-regulation is unable to protect young people effectively against harmful effects of exposure to alcohol marketing. The intense competition among alcohol producers propels the expansion of alcohol promotion and advertising. There is strong resistance on the part of the industry to further control the volume of alcohol advertising and promotion (Giesbrecht 2000). Due to the conflict of interests, we should not ask the alcohol industry to restrict the volume of alcohol marketing themselves. The volume of alcohol marketing should be restricted in statutory regulations.

Scientific literature shows that self-regulation tends to be fragile and largely ineffective in countries where it is the primary way to control alcohol advertising, in part because it is often circumvented and rarely enforced”

STAP is a strong proponent to a world wide Framework for Alcohol Policy similar to the WHO Framework on Tobacco Control. This is especially important to restrict the harmful effects of alcohol marketing. Alcoholic beverages tend to be marketed globally. At this moment legislation on alcohol marketing, however, is often structured at the national or regional level and is not able to regulate international strategies of alcohol marketing. This emphasizes the need for harmonization of statutory regulations at a supra-national level. Supra-national institutions such as the EU and WHO should function as a leader in this process.