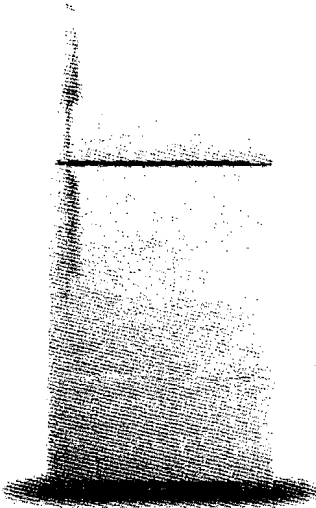




# MICAP RECAP

January 2006

**The Easiest Place**  
*For Kids* **to Get Beer**



**is right next to the milk.**

One of the easiest places for kids to get alcohol is in your own kitchen.  
Take stock of your supply.

**Keep Alcohol Out of The Hands of Kids.**

State officials from across the nation recently came to Washington for a briefing on the latest research and strategies for combating the problem of underage drinking. NIAAA director Dr. Ting Kai Li addressed the conference, noting that teenagers who have their first drink at age 13 are four to five times more likely to become alcoholics than if they had their first drink at 21. Some four million 12- to 17-year-olds drink at least monthly, and more than half of those engage in risky behavior, Dr. Li added. In the discussion that followed, a variety of opinions were expressed about the problem, and the one fact where there was unanimous

agreement was that alcohol was easy for underage kids to get.

An overview of programs designed to keep alcohol out of the hands of kids frequently mentions strategies to make it more difficult to alter drivers' licenses and other forms of ID used to illegally purchase alcoholic beverages from party stores, supermarkets, bars and taverns. And, local and state law enforcement agencies frequently run sting operations to discover which licensees knowingly or unknowingly sell alcohol to kids under 21. In spite of these efforts, survey data continue to reveal that access to alcohol is hardly

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a problem for minors who want to drink.

Knowing that so many prevention programs focus on licensees, a recent experience made me wonder if we should not reconsider prevention priorities when it comes to making it more difficult for kids to have access to alcohol.

On a brief trip to our neighborhood grocery, I found myself in the checkout line, behind a customer who was about to purchase a bottle of wine. The clerk scanned the price into the computer and then asked, "Birth date?"

The response came: 7/12/66, along with a broad smile from the customer, who appeared to be well above the legal age for purchasing alcoholic beverages.

When it came my turn to settle up for a gallon of milk and a dozen oranges, I questioned the cashier as to why she asked the age of a customer who could hardly be mistaken for a minor.

"We do it with everybody," she explained. "Making age checks a habit helps us to guard against getting careless and inadvertently selling to a minor. At least that was how the manager explained it to all of the store's cashiers."

Not a bad idea, I thought, although probably not too many other stores follow the practice of questioning every customer who wants to buy a bottle of wine or six-pack of beer.

Still, the threat of a license suspension or revocation is a powerful incentive for most merchants to carefully screen potential customers when it comes to alcoholic beverages.

The American Medical Association (AMA) commissioned a survey recently by Teenage Research Unlimited to find out what the kids themselves had to say about where they accessed alcohol for their use.

Sure enough, just over one-third admitted buying alcohol using a fake ID. But when it came to making sting operations to catch careless licensees and perfecting IDs so they would be more difficult to alter, the AMA survey was clear that the most effective strategy to limit kids' ability to get alcohol should select a different target: parents and other adults.

In the AMA survey, reported in the *Los Angeles*

*Times*, underage drinkers said they found it easy to obtain alcohol from an adult, particularly at parties. More than one-fourth of the teens said they had attended a party where kids consumed alcohol with parents present. And almost one-third of the teens said it was easy to get alcohol from their parents with their parents' knowledge.

Far fewer teens reported getting alcohol using riskier methods, such as trying to buy it themselves or using a fake ID.

The results confirm how easy it is for teens to obtain alcohol from adults, either with their permission or surreptitiously. The "Monitoring the Future" survey conducted by the University of Michigan has found that, nationwide, about 75% of high school seniors and 39% of eighth-graders say they have consumed alcohol in the last year.

"The perception out there is that 90% of teens get alcohol using fake IDs and by going to bars. That's not true," says Dr. J. Edward Hill, president of the American Medical Association. "They are getting it from social sources: parents, older friends, older siblings and others. Parents need to become aware of the fact that a large percentage of alcohol comes from their own homes or the homes of other parents."

The survey, from the American Medical Association, involved 701 teens ages 13 to 18 and 2,283 adults, of whom 394 were parents of children ages 12 to 20.

Many of the adults displayed a nonchalant attitude about teen drinking. About one-fourth of the parents polled in the study said they have allowed their teens to drink alcohol in the last six months.

"The rationalization among parents is teens are going to do it anyway, let them do it under my supervision," says Pat Hines, executive director of Safe Moves, a Los Angeles nonprofit program on traffic safety education that recently developed a program for teens on drinking and driving. "Parents think they can control it. I think that's a fallacy. [Drinking] becomes almost acceptable when a parent establishes those parameters."

Parents may not understand the toll of underage drinking, Hill says. Research shows underage

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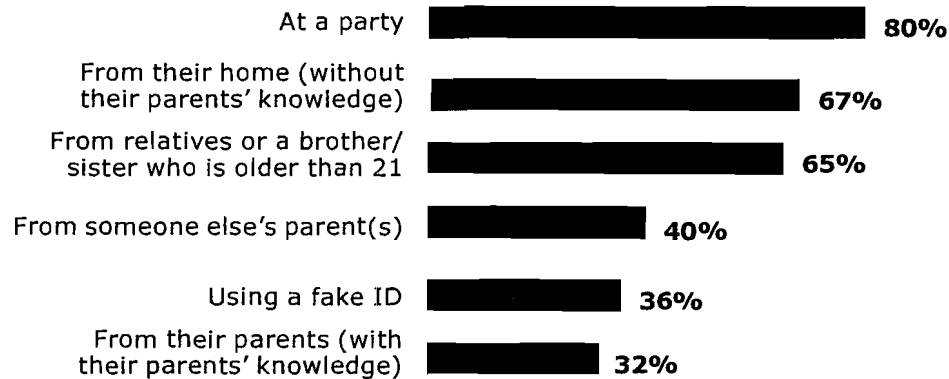
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## Where Teens Get Alcohol

Teenagers have little difficulty obtaining alcohol, finds a survey sponsored by the American Medical Association, with adults often complicit in the process.

**Percentage of teenagers saying it was easy to get alcohol through the following sources:**



\*The survey of 701 U.S. teens, ages 13 to 18, was conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited in April 2005 and is accurate within 4 percentage points.

Source: American Medical Association.

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drinking plays a large part in teen crime, violence, sexual activity and accidents. Underage drinking can lead to addiction or other substance abuse, affect school performance and even damage the developing brain.

"A child who begins to drink before the legal drinking age may end up having a significant problem with reasoning and memory because of their alcohol use," says Hill. "That kid is not going to do as well in school. Parents are not as aware [of the consequences] as they should be."

The alcohol industry should be included in efforts to hold adults more responsible, Hill says.

"The industry says, 'Talk to your kids about drinking.' But they are out there advertising to kids. They are the ones that make parents' jobs so difficult," he says.

Education needs to be aimed at adults and teens to curb the use of alcohol, Hines says. Hines' new program, called Wheel Smarts, uses plays and staged "crime scene investigations" to prompt teens

to think about the consequences of alcohol use. It is funded by the California Office of Traffic Safety and is offered to Los Angeles-area middle and high schools.

"Parents can lay down the law, but kids are still going to do what they want," she says. "The solution truly is education aimed at the parents and the kids, because the kids are the ones who are going to get behind the wheel. But education is expensive, and it's hard work."

**MASSIVE LAYOFFS . . .** in the auto industry have the business world worried about the state of the economy for the new year. Much of the publicity has centered around restructuring at the Ford Motor Company, but the announcement that GM's staggering \$8.6 billion loss last year was the second worst in the company's history is sending ripples throughout the nation as plants are either downsizing or closing altogether.

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No such problems, though, in the liquor industry where sales rose last year by 7.5 percent, to \$16.3 billion. The decade-long decrease in alcohol consumption of the 1990s appears to be long gone, as drinkers belly up to the bars across America in record numbers these days.

According to Peter Cressy, president of the Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S. (DISCUS), consumers have not only regained their appetite for alcoholic beverages, they are drinking better as they continue to favor premium spirits products.

"The industry continues to see strong growth among premium and super-premium products across all spirits categories," he said. Although wine is now the most popular alcoholic beverage of choice among drinkers, spending on wine amounts to only 15.7 percent of alcoholic beverage sales. Beer continues to be the alcoholic beverage sales leader at 55.5 percent, followed by liquor at 28.7 percent.

**BY THE NUMBERS . . .** Almost daily the news media reports on the latest death toll for the U.S. in Iraq. Whether suicide bombers were the killers or sniper fire from insurgents, the numbers are regularly posted, supposedly so that readers can understand more completely the price we pay for our involvement in the Iraq war.

When the death toll hit 1,000, the media gave special coverage, and after hitting the 2,000 mark, reporters appeared to make a special effort to be sure readers understood the cost of the war in far-off Iraq.

Meanwhile, here at home, America's war on drugs continues with little publicity about the role alcohol plays—no summaries, no running totals, and few editorials to urge measures to reduce the impact of alcohol-related injuries and deaths.

For the record, here are numbers we also need to keep in mind:

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| 75,766    | Number of persons who died in 2003 from the harmful effects of excessive alcohol use, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. |
| 12 Drinks | The average daily alcohol consumption of the top 2½% of drinkers in the United States, accounting for a third of all the alcohol sold.             |
| 6,654     | Persons killed in alcohol-related traffic crashes in the United States in 2004.  |

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## MISSION STATEMENT

### *The Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems seeks to:*

1. Broaden the awareness of the religious community, public officials and the Michigan Public to the destructive consequences of alcohol, other drugs, tobacco and gambling, and offer positive solutions.
2. Educate the Michigan Public for responsible controls in the areas of alcohol, other drugs, tobacco and gambling, and
3. Alert and mobilize supporters to any public policy changes related to MICAP's mission.