

Study: Booze Industry Breaks its Own Underage Ad Rules

Government and University Researchers Find Violations

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Published: [November 07, 2013](#)

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The alcohol industry has violated its own rules aimed at keeping booze ads away from under-age viewers, government and university researchers allege in a new report.

Beer and liquor marketers have since 2003 pledged to show ads only on TV programs, magazines and web sites where adult viewers dominate the audience. The current standard prohibits ads when under-21 audience exceeds 28.4%. But in 25 of the nation's largest TV markets, almost one in four alcohol ads violated the voluntary standards, according to researchers from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, known as CAMY, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Comedy Central's 'Tosh.0' is an example cited by CAMY

The "results of this evaluation suggest that the alcohol industry has not consistently met its 2003 self-regulatory standards," according to the study, which is published in CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report for Nov. 8.

Frank Coleman, senior VP of liquor trade group Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S., responded in a statement that "DISCUS member companies rigorously comply with the 71.6% adult demographic required by our industry Code. The FTC regularly monitors our advertising and has concluded that our ads are directed to adults. In fact, the DISCUS Code has been held up as a model of self-regulation and corporate social responsibility."

Joe McClain, president of the Beer Institute, an industry trade group, said in a statement that "once again, a CAMY study is rooted in shaky ground, with taxpayers footing the bill for the group's anti-alcohol advocacy." He said that brewers and beer importers "take the task of responsible advertising very seriously and actively work with educators, parents, law enforcement and policymakers to further reduce the country's underage drinking rate, which is at a record-low level," pointing to research [posted on the Anheuser-Busch InBev web site](#).

The CAMY study looked at ad placements in 2010 for 40 programs covering network sports, network non-sports, cable sports and cable non-sports that were known to have large youth audiences. The programs in which the violations occurred included "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" on E!, "Tosh.0" on [Comedy Central](#) and "Deadliest Warrior" on Spike, David Jernigan, the director of CAMY, said in an interview. The study used Nielsen data to assess exposure in the 25 markets that account for about half of the U.S. population ages 12-20 living in homes with TVs. Violations were highest in Houston (31.5%), Los Angeles (30%) and Dallas (29.7%).

The findings show that the industry is "not taking into account local market dynamics because we found such a high rate of ads on programs that exceeded the industry threshold. We found them particularly on non-sports cable [shows]," Mr. Jernigan said. (The industry uses national demographic data, [according to its code](#).)

CAMY supports a proposal the Federal Trade Commission put forth in 1999 calling for the industry to develop "no-buy" lists banning alcohol ads on TV shows and other media that "are likely to have disproportionately large underage audiences." CAMY has also pushed for the industry to tighten its threshold to bar booze ads on shows in which more than 15% of the audience is ages 12-20.

The beer and liquor industry tightened its threshold from 30% to 28.4% in 2011 to reflect 2010 Census data showing that 71.6% of the U.S. population is 21 years of age and older.