Some people have charged the alcoholic beverages industry with deliberately marketing beer and other alcoholic beverages to teens. Should the government regulate or ban alcohol advertising?

**Teens and Alcohol Advertising.**

Many public health officials consider alcohol to be the leading drug problem facing America's teens. According to former Surgeon General David Satcher, alcohol "is consumed more frequently than all other illicit drugs combined and is the drug most likely to be associated with injury or death. Alcohol is a drug that can affect judgment, coordination and long-term health. It is involved in teen automobile crashes, homicides, and suicides—the three leading causes of teen deaths." In 2003 the Institute of Medicine, a federal agency, estimated that that underage drinking costs the United States about $53 billion a year from traffic accidents, fatalities, and violence.

Some of the efforts to prevent the problem of alcohol consumption among teens has focused on the marketing of alcoholic beverages. The debate over whether beer, wine, and liquor companies should be allowed to advertise their products on television has gained national prominence because of two key developments. First, in the so-called "tobacco wars" of the 1990s, the American public learned, from tobacco industry documents that were made public, that for decades the major tobacco companies had been subtly marketing cigarettes to young people. Many public health advocates began questioning whether the alcohol industry has also targeted young people with its advertising. Second, in June 1996 the Seagram Company began airing ads for its Crown Royal Canadian whiskey on television, thus ending a voluntary fifty-year ban on the airing of liquor ads on television (although beer and wine ads are commonplace). The move led many parents and politicians to question whether alcohol advertisements should be allowed on television.

Critics argue that alcohol ads that feature cute animals or show young (albeit not underage) people at parties have inherent youth appeal. William Beaver, a professor of social science at Robert Morris College, summarizes the concern over the influence of alcohol advertising on youth: "Children exposed to alcohol advertising over a period of years can gain a false impression about drinking (it's always good!), which becomes part of their value system and influences later drinking behavior." James F. Mosher, a senior policy adviser at the Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems, charges that such influence is the intended goal of alcohol advertising: "As with tobacco, beer marketers target teen-agers. They know that the earlier you start to drink the more likely you are to become a heavy drinker.".

Industry spokesmen have vehemently denied any link between advertising and underage drinking. Jeffrey Becker, a vice president of the Beer Institute, an industry trade group, says that the beer industry markets to people of legal age and that "there's not a single credible study that shows advertising encourages young people to drink." The best way to prevent underage drinking, according to the alcohol industry, is to enforce the laws that bar sales of alcohol to those under twenty-one. Anheuser-Busch vice president Francine Katz says teens who drink should not be seen as "hapless victims" of advertising: "The fact that they may like a commercial is no excuse to break the law. There isn't a young person in America who doesn't know it's illegal to drink."