



Message from ACS: Industry and Government Can Work Together to Tackle Underage Drinking

In a new wave of crackdowns on the sale of alcohol to underage persons, the Home Office has coordinated a test purchasing campaign targeting on and off licence premises around the country. The premises were chosen by local police based on intelligence suggesting they had underage sales problems. As a result of visits to 224 premises in the three weeks up to 29th October 2006, 42 premises failed test purchases at least once and the authorities have started alcohol licence review proceedings against them.

The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS), which represents over 32,000 local shops, has made it clear to the authorities that the trade is doing an enormous amount of work to tackle this problem, but has reiterated its warning to retailers that the consequences of failing to handle the problem of underage sales are severe. ACS has also set out the challenge of working in partnership with Government, at both national and local level, to tackle the problem of underage drinking.

ACS Chief Executive James Lowman said: “The convenience sector has been working extremely hard to prevent underage people from buying alcohol from our stores. This latest action shows that unfortunately mistakes are still being made. We are acutely aware that the problem of underage drinking will not go away overnight and we need to work even harder. This action is a further reminder to retailers, if one were needed, that the consequences of failing a test purchase are increasingly tough.”

Working with ACS, convenience retailers are committed to the ‘challenge 21’ policy and companies from the smallest independent business to multiple groups are using the Under 21 materials. Led by ACS over 10,000 shops signed up to the action, and thousands more are now involved.

James Lowman continued: “Retailers are developing ever more sophisticated training methods, and ensuring that training is not only given but regularly refreshed. Whilst this enforcement action highlights the fact that problems persist, thousands of stores are getting it right and the overall trend is a reduction in failures of test purchases.

“We believe that licensing authorities and Government should ensure that the recourse for removing an alcohol licence is a measure of last resort. The Licensing Act provides a sophisticated range of options to a licensing

authority to work with the premises involved to tackle the problem. Helping a business to be part of the solution is a better option for the business and the community than removing their ability to trade altogether.”

Mr Lowman has also stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to tackling underage drinking:

“We are absolutely clear that our common objective is to reduce the prevalence of underage drinking in the UK. There is the problem of young people breaking the law by attempting to buy when underage, over 18 year olds buying alcohol on behalf of under 18s and the supply of smuggled or counterfeit alcohol, which is an unregulated source of alcohol for young people. We accept that enforcement authorities will take action against licensed premises, but we believe that much more needs to be done if together we are to achieve our overall objective of reducing underage drinking.”

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Notes to Editors:

1. National Test Purchase Results: the recent Alcohol Misuse Enforcement Campaign (May-June 2006) indicated a failure rate in off licenses of 21% down from 32% (winter 2004/05) and 36% (summer 2005).
2. Licence Review Procedure: Under the Licensing Act 2003, local Police can make a formal application for a review of an alcohol licence, this is considered by the local licensing authority. The licensing authority has to decide whether to proceed to a formal hearing of the licensing committee, and has the opportunity to agree a compromise between with the business in question, that may avoid the need for a formal hearing. If a hearing does take place the licensing authority has a range of powers, these include imposing new conditions on how the business will be run, as well as powers to suspend or revoke the licence.
3. The Home Office press statement is available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>
4. ACS has been a leading voice in responsible retailing, mailing out 30,000 Under 21 posters to members, and distributing 30,000 Under 21 staff badges to promote the Challenge 21 message. ACS is a founding member of CitizenCard, the leading proof of age provider, supplying materials and support to retailers for over 5 years. ACS is

also a board member of the PASS scheme and provides responsible retailing advice and training free of charge to ACS and non-ACS members.