

12th August, 2008

Health Department's alcohol consultation gets under way

A major consultation about England's drinking culture, announced last month by the Department of Health, is now under way.

The consultation comes in the wake of independent reviews showing that the drinks industry is not adhering to its own voluntary standards, and new evidence suggesting that alcohol is a far wider cause of damage to people's health than previously suspected. New calculations put the cost of alcohol misuse to society at £17.7 billion to £25.1 billion per year, with a cost to the NHS of £2.7 billion.

The consultation proposals would mean that the current voluntary retailing code could become mandatory. This would mean that retailers could have to:

- restrict the way alcohol is sold such as offering drinks in small as well as large glasses or measures - often only one size is offered or a large one is automatically given;
- restrict happy hours or price-based promotions - 'women drink for free' promotions are still common;
- display alcohol in off-licence premises in separate areas - no more displays by the checkout;
- give point-of-sale information, e.g. on units, allowing customers to make an informed choice; and
- train staff in shops and venues to recognise and refuse alcohol to under-age or drunk customers.

Manufacturers will be given until the end of the year to put the required warnings and advice on bottles and cans. If not, the Government will move to put a mandatory scheme in place. This would require health and unit information on all drinks containers.

The Department of Health would like to encourage as many individuals and organisations to respond to the consultation which can be found on [the Department of Health's web site](#).