

Alcohol's saturation point: Rethink regulations

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I want to thank The Star for the editorial of March 24, "Impaired judgment on alcohol bills." Drug Free Marion County is quite concerned about the legislation changes made and those under consideration. Most of the changes under consideration will result in alcohol becoming more accessible.

For an example of the problems that are created by deregulation, one can look to Great Britain, which is experiencing negative outcomes. Experts report that the cost of treating the growing number of people drinking heavily threatens to cripple the National Health System. With a quarter of England's population consuming hazardous amounts of alcohol, the NHS has spent 2.7 billion pounds to treat patients.

Furthermore, a report by the Health

Evidence Network, which is coordinated by the World Health Organization, documents policy changes recently enacted by European countries in an effort to prevent high-risk drinking. For instance, alcohol availability is restricted on days of important soccer games. This approach was also taken during the Olympic hockey games, when stores selling alcohol were told to close. It seems particularly odd that American cities hosting the Super Bowl are required by the NFL to ensure the sale of alcohol on Super Bowl Sunday.

Indiana needs to rethink its approach to alcohol regulation. In recent years industry officials have been at the forefront of regulation change, many of which have moved toward deregulation and increasing the visibility of alcohol in stores. Decisions have included allowing alcohol to be sold in convenience stores, desegregating alcohol in drugstores, and allowing grocery stores to use their pharmacy permit to sell liquor in addition to beer and wine. Those changes now allow stores to display alcohol on end caps, in seasonal promotion areas and next to the snack foods. This exposure to alcohol not only promotes sales but also changes community norms. Alcohol is no longer a product for adults only; it is as common as chips and soda.

Alcohol plays a role in violent crime, car crashes, personal accidents, high-risk behavior and long-term illness. In 2008, Marion County had 1,170 alcohol-related car crashes, resulting in 35 fatalities. Fifty-five percent of our eighth-grade students report having used alcohol, and 30 percent of 12th-graders report drinking in the past month.

It is time that we look at our alcohol regulations and streamline the law book, give local alcohol boards more say in denying permit requests that are not appropriate to the community, and institute rules that allow access to alcohol but don't saturate the community with three or more businesses selling alcohol on the same corner. Return to segregated alcohol sales space and take liquor out of drug and grocery stores altogether. Include all of Marion County

as one incorporated area and impose the quotas appropriately.

Marion County has grown considerably since 1969, yet those are the boundaries being used to define the incorporated area of Indianapolis. The rest of the county is being governed by a quota allowance designed for rural communities, not the thriving, populated townships that they have become.