

Cinco de Mayo
Holiday co-opted by Alcohol Industry

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Statement from Richard Yoast, PhD, Director, Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions and A Matter of Degree

As preparations for Cinco de Mayo celebrations become a reality, it is important to point out the co-opting of the holiday's true meaning by the alcohol industry. Across the country, beer and distilled spirits manufacturers have made Cinco de Mayo into another holiday symbolized by binge drinking and reckless behavior. What is disturbing is the alcohol industry's relentless pursuit of underage youth, especially Hispanic youth.

A report by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) www.camy.org, released April 30, 2003, illustrates the marketing strategy by the alcohol industry. Hispanic youth in the United States are exposed to more alcohol advertising than non-Hispanic youth. Hispanic youth saw 24 percent more beer/ale and distilled spirits ads and 32 percent more youth-appealing "low alcohol refresher" or malternative ads in magazines than non-Hispanic youth. And while the report indicates that Hispanic and non-Hispanic youth hear about the same number of beer ads on the radio, Hispanic youth hear 17 percent more ads for malternatives. An earlier study by CAMY found that Hispanic youth were overexposed to 34 percent more alcohol advertising on radio than the intended adult target audience.

Cinco de Mayo is a celebration of Mexican culture and unity, not an opportunity to glamorize drinking and encourage underage youth to use a product that is illegal for them to even purchase. Communities that have eliminated alcohol promotion and sales at their celebrations attract many individuals and families who stayed away because of the growing focus on alcohol.

Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions and A Matter of Degree, two national initiatives funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and housed at the American Medical Association, have organized efforts across the country to address the ease at which youth and young people are encouraged to drink early and often. We urge communities to deny the alcohol industry access to our young people.