

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***Public Has Inaccurate Perceptions of Effectiveness of
Minimum Drinking Age Laws and Raising Alcohol Prices***

While the American public has an accurate perception of the role alcohol has in fatal injuries, it's understanding of the effectiveness of alcohol control policies in reducing alcohol-related deaths is poor, according to a national telephone survey of accidental injuries and how to prevent them. Overall, respondents accurately estimated the proportion of unintentional injury deaths in which the victim was legally drunk when they died, with the exception of motor vehicle crashes (which were overestimated) and fire/burns (which were underestimated). However, respondents did not have accurate perceptions of the effectiveness of minimum drinking age laws and raising alcohol prices in reducing alcohol-related deaths (see figure below). According to the authors, "Professionals engaged in injury prevention and alcohol control research should include the public among the important audiences they attempt to reach with their findings" (p. 629).

**Effectiveness of Alcohol-Control Policies in Reducing Alcohol-Related Injury Deaths,
Research Findings and U.S. Resident's Perceptions**

	Research Findings	U.S. Resident's Perceptions
Minimum Drinking Age Laws	Research has shown that increasing the legal drinking age from 18 to 21 has significantly reduced motor vehicle crashes. Official estimates are that increasing the drinking age to 21 has prevented 20,000 deaths since 1975.	Slightly less than one-half (49%) of the respondents believed such legislation has resulted in fewer accidental deaths.
Raising Alcohol Prices	Research indicates that raising the price of alcohol reduces motor vehicle crash fatality rates.	Less than one-fourth (21%) of U.S. residents thought that raising alcohol prices through taxation would result in fewer accidental deaths.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Girasek D. C., Gielen A. C., Smith, G. S. "Alcohol's Contribution to Fatal Injuries: A Report on Public Perceptions," *Annals of Emergency Medicine* 39(6):622-630, 2002. For more information, contact Dr. Deborah C. Girasek at Dgirasek@usuhs.mil.