

Industry initiatives to prevent drinking and driving lack evidence of effectiveness

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The majority of the alcohol industry's actions around the world to reduce drinking and driving either lack evidence of effectiveness or haven't been studied, new Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health research suggests.

Reporting Feb. 18 in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the researchers analyzed the content of 266 initiatives the [alcohol industry](#) implemented around the world to reduce drinking and [driving](#) between 1982 and 2015.

They found that the most commonly used industry initiatives—including designated driver programs, ride services and mass media campaigns—lack evidence of effectiveness or have not been studied.

For instance, while ride services may reduce drinking and driving, people may actually consume more [alcohol](#), which can increase the risk of other negative outcomes such as violence and injuries, the researchers say. Additionally, [mass media](#) campaigns with messages to drivers about reducing their alcohol consumption are generally ineffective unless they are rigorously planned and executed, and used alongside other evidence-based interventions.

Over the past 30 years, the alcohol industry has implemented more than 3,500 initiatives around the world to reduce harmful drinking as part of their corporate social responsibility business practices. Along with individual alcohol corporations, many of these programs are led by

industry trade associations and public relations organizations funded by the industry. Fewer than 3 percent of the industry actions listed a health-related agency as a partner.

"Our findings suggest that almost none of the alcohol industry's efforts to reduce drinking and driving were based on what scientific evidence has told us can work to improve [public health](#)," says study supervisor Adnan A. Hyder, MD, PhD, MPH, a professor in the Department of International Health at the Bloomberg School.

According to the World Health Organization, driving under the influence of alcohol contributes to nearly 15 percent of road traffic deaths globally.

To conduct the study, the researchers analyzed an online database of industry initiatives for reducing harmful drinking kept by the International Alliance for Responsible Drinking, an industry group. Of the 266 actions they evaluated, the majority were instituted in Europe (61.7 percent) followed by the Americas (22.2 percent).

Examples of interventions that have been shown to have the highest levels of evidence of effectiveness include the use of sobriety checkpoints and the installation of ignition interlocks that prevent someone with an elevated blood alcohol level from driving a car. The researchers found that these were only used 0.8 percent of the time among the sample of industry initiatives in the study. Nearly 42 percent lack evidence of effectiveness, while 56 percent have not been scientifically evaluated or there is insufficient evidence to make a determination.

Despite their wide use, there is little [evidence](#) that programs funded by the alcohol industry actually protect public health and prevent drinking and driving, the researchers say. In fact, the industry commonly

distributed flyers, leaflets and small giveaways about the risks of [drinking](#), which the researchers say not only isn't effective, but often doubled as marketing for the alcohol brands that sponsor such programs.

"The majority of [industry](#) initiatives are either ineffective or of unknown effectiveness; public health interventions are generally held to a higher standard," says study co-author, David Jernigan, PhD, an associate professor in the Department of Health, Behavior and Society at the Bloomberg School.

"Evaluation of the Evidence Base for the Alcohol Industry's Actions to Reduce Drink Driving Globally," was written by Marissa Esser, PhD, MPH; James Bao, MSPH; David H. Jernigan PhD; and Adnan A. Hyder, MD, PhD, MPH.

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Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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