

# What is Environmental Prevention?

Prevention strategies are policies, programs, and practices that promote the well-being of people and reduce the consumption of - and the problems associated with - alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Grounded in the field of public health, which emphasizes the broader physical, social, cultural and institutional forces that contribute to the problems, environmental strategies incorporate prevention efforts aimed at changing or influencing community conditions, standards, institutions, structures, systems and policies.

Individuals do not become involved with substances solely on the basis of personal characteristics. They are influenced by a complex set of factors, such as institutional rules and regulations, community norms, mass media messages and the accessibility of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD).



Policies, formal or informal, can be enacted locally. Informal policy change can occur at a high school, police department or with local merchants. For example, if local alcohol retailers are willing to attend merchant education sessions voluntarily, formal policy change is unnecessary. However, if your community determines parents and other adults are the main suppliers of alcohol to underage drinkers, existing ordinances and laws related to social host issues may require more formal policy change.

Community mobilization is the key to success of environmental strategies because these strategies must be supported by a critical mass of community stakeholders in order to

succeed. Forming Coalitions between different sectors in the community – policy makers, parents, educators, youth, faith-based communities, law enforcement, health professionals, the media etc – who all have a stake in solving a particular community problem, work effectively to change community norms to keep youth and adults safe.

Like other prevention strategies, in order to be most successful, environmental strategies require a comprehensive community prevention planning process to guide their selection and implementation.



Prevention, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, is a process that empowers individuals and systems to meet the challenges of life events and transitions by creating and reinforcing conditions that promote healthy behaviors and lifestyles.

### **SAMHSA's goal of substance abuse prevention is to foster a climate in which:**

1. Alcohol use is acceptable only for those of legal age and only when the risk of adverse consequences is minimal;
2. Prescription and over-the-counter drugs are used only for the purposes for which they were intended;
3. Other abusable substances such as aerosols are used only for their intended purposes; and
4. Illegal drugs and tobacco are not used at all.

**The role of prevention is to create healthy communities in which people have a high quality of life through:**

- Healthy environments at work and in school
- Supportive communities and neighborhoods
- Connections with families and friends
- Drug and crime-free lives

[www.samhsa.gov/prevention](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention)

## **Evidence-Based Prevention**

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

## **Who is responsible for prevention efforts?**

It Takes a Village.