



The serious movement to control alcohol in Thai society started in July 2003 with the “No Alcohol during Buddhist Lent” campaign. In addition, the Cabinet passed a resolution to establish the National Committee for Alcohol Consumption Control and to limit the time for alcoholic beverage advertisements on TV. This eventually led to the Alcohol Beverage Control Act B.E. 2551 (2008). Thailand has more measures to control alcohol consumption than the international average, but serious policy implementation is still lacking. The question is why this is the case.

5 Alcohol Control Policies and Measures Still Not Strict and Sincere

Measures to Control Alcohol are Stringent, but the Number of Drinkers Has Not Declined

During the past five years, the measures to control alcohol cover four areas. Controlling accessibility and purchase is limiting the time for the sale of alcohol to only during 11.00–14.00 and 17.00–24.00 hrs. The age of buyers and drinkers must be at least 18 and alcohol is banned from being sold in certain places such as educational institutes, temples, and gas service stations. The measure to limit drinking prohibits alcohol to be sold to those who are drunk and prohibits those under 20 years of age to enter entertainment venues. The measure to reduce accidents prohibits driving while intoxicated and the penalties have been increased. The campaign measure stipulates that alcohol is a food that must have a warning label and alcohol is banned from being sold on important Buddhist holidays. Further, there is a total ban on alcohol advertisements but which has not yet been accomplished.¹

The Alcohol Beverage Control Act B.E. 2551 (2008), which came into effect on 14 February 2008,²

aims to reduce the impact from alcohol in three areas: (1) reduce the number of new drinkers by increasing the age that youth start drinking, (2) reduce the overall consumption of the population, and (3) reduce harm from alcohol consumption such as accidents, violence and health problems.

However, the enforcement impact of these measures is low. The “National Alcohol Policy Strategic Plan” that the National Health Commission will present to the Cabinet for approval in March 2010 stated that even though the manufacture and import of alcoholic beverages (in terms of volume) has been stable in the past 2–3 years, the number of new Thai drinkers has increase to approximately 260,000 people per year, including a high rise in the number of female and young drinkers. The document reported that

(1) Drinking has become a more common behaviour among Thais. Statistics show that the number of regular drinkers, those who drink weekly or daily, climbed from 37% in 1996 to 41% in 2007. On the other hand, the number of infrequent drinkers declined and the number of elderly drinkers has a downward trend. It seems as if the campaign to reduce, refrain

and stop alcohol consumption is effective on the group who drink a small amount, but is not effective on the group who are regular drinkers.

(2) The alcoholic beverage market in Thailand continues to grow, both in volume and value, especially western style alcoholic beverages which often introduce new flavours and packaging to target youth, both male and female. At the same time, operators continue to heavily spend on direct and indirect advertising of alcoholic beverages.³

Tourism and Drinking on Important Buddhist Holidays

In the past years, the Government has prohibited the sale of alcohol on four important Buddhist holidays including Makha Bucha Day, Visakha Bucha Day, Asalha Bucha Day and Buddhist Lent Day. In 2009, the StopDrink Network advocated for the ban on alcohol sales during Songkran Holiday. However, this was unsuccessful because the National Committee on Alcohol Consumption Control chaired by Maj. Gen. Sanan Kachornprasart, Deputy Prime Minister from Chart Thai Pattana Party and a winery owner, rejected the ban.

In addition, Mr. Chumpol Silpa-archa, Head of Chart Thai Pattana Party and Tourism and Sports Minister, proposed to the National Committee on Alcohol Consumption Control that the ban on alcohol sales during important Buddhist holidays should be waived in hotels. The Stop Drink Network was definitely against this proposal. On 3 July 2009, the Prime Minister's Office announced the restriction of the sales of all types of alcoholic beverages on important Buddhist holidays, with no venue exceptions.⁴ But this achievement lasted only one day. The following day, the National Committee on Alcohol Consumption Control changed its resolution and permitted hotels registered under the Hotel Act to sell alcohol on Buddhist holidays.⁵

Dr. Bundit Sornpaisal, Director of the Center for Alcohol Study, commented that this issue involves the relationship between the business sector and politicians. It should be closely watched whether politicians actually favour the benefit of the Thai people or the benefit of the business sector.⁶

Many Illegal Shops Selling Alcohol around Universities in Bangkok and Vicinities

Accessibility to alcoholic drinks has never been a problem for Thai drinkers. In a survey conducted in 2003, there were 585,700 shops with alcohol sales license, or approximately one shop per 110 people. Consumers spend only 7.5 minutes to purchase alcohol and only 3% of consumers reported difficulty in purchasing alcohol.⁷ Therefore, it is very easy for Thais to access shops that sell alcohol.

"Drinking together" in order to form relationships among teenage students has been instilled in every generation, becoming a custom that has been passed down such as forcing new students to drink during student initiation, treating younger students with alcoholic drinks, and confiding by drinking alcohol. It is believed that after drinking, people will dare to speak up and that venues which sell alcohol are good places to talk after an exhausting school day.⁸ Therefore, businesses that sell alcohol and teenagers go together well, evidenced by an average of 57 shops per sq.km around universities in Bangkok.⁹ (See table on page 56)

Many government agencies have continuously tried to solve this problem. A meeting between the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Committee to Solve Alcohol Sales around Educational Institutes comprising of 25 institutes held on 6 August 2009 concluded that alcohol sales would be banned within 500 meters of educational institutes. The Bangkok and Provincial Committees on Alcohol Consumption Control and educational institutes would jointly consider the exempted areas, which would be able to sell alcohol. It was also proposed that this announcement would be effective 180 days after being published in the Royal Gazette. Operators with a license to sell alcohol before the announcement became effective would be able to sell alcohol until their license expired.¹⁰

Despite the meeting resolution, there has been no enforcement because the resolution has not yet been published in the Royal Gazette. As a result, many organizations have neglected to deal with this problem.

Number of Shops Selling Alcohol within 500 Meter Radius of Educational Institutes

Educational Institute	No. of Shops Selling Alcohol	Surrounding Area (Sq. Km.)	No. of Shops Per Sq. Km.
Chulalongkorn University	407	3.15	129
Ramkhamhaeng University	164	2.25	73
Kasetsart University	129	3.90	33
Chandrasakorn Rajabhat University	125	1.68	74
King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang	123	3.81	32
Srinakharinwirot University	100	1.66	60
University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce	95	1.26	76
Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University	94	1.68	56
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University and Suan Dusit Rajabhat University	86	1.72	50
Rajamangala University of Technology (2 campuses)	83	2.04	41
Dhurakij Pundit University	81	1.50	54
Siam University	81	1.43	57
South-East Asia University	76	1.71	45
Assumption University	54	1.30	42
Silpakorn University	14	1.09	13
Total 15 Universities	1,712	30.19	57

Source: Pattaraporn Polpanatham. 2009. Distribution of alcohol shops around universities in Bangkok. Bangkok: Center for Alcohol Studies. (Citation Dr. Bundit Sornpisal and First Lieutenant Juttaporn Kaewmungkun. 2009. Table 1 page 2)

'Smoothies Mixed with Alcohol' the In-Trend Drink of Teens

Besides the problem of shops selling alcohol around educational institutes, 'smoothies mixed with alcohol' has also permeated into teen culture. 'Smoothies mixed with alcohol' are sold in the shops that sell alcohol around universities. The reasons for drinking 'smoothies mixed with alcohol' are they are easy to drink, invitation by friends, and sales strategies. The containers are usually clear enabling drinkers to see the colour of the 'smoothies mixed with alcohol' and the cheap prices allow teens to easily buy the drinks. In addition, the atmosphere and decoration of the shops attract the interest of teenagers who are the target customers.¹¹

Related parties have tried to stop the prevalence of this new type of alcoholic drink. Efforts include ordering police arrests as well as a request from the Youth Network to Prevent New Drinkers comprising of 34 organizations to Maj. Gen. Sanan to solve the problem by issuing clear policies and regulations to strictly control this matter.¹² However, it seems that efforts remain just efforts because real practice has not shown any results.

Delay in Enforcing the Alcohol Control Act

The main obstacle in seriously solving these problems is the delay in establishing policies and measures, especially four related ministerial regulations, namely the draft notification of the Prime Minister's Office regarding restrictions on the methods for selling alcohol B.E. 2552, which prohibits the sale of alcohol in the form of mixing with sweetened drinks, fruit juice, fruit-flavoured drinks or other substances and blending together such as 'smoothies mixed with alcohol', in Bangkok and the provinces, with the exception of licensed entertainment venues under the Entertainment Places Act.

The 2nd draft notification of the Prime Minister's Office involves the designation of alcohol-free zones which prohibits the sale of alcohol within 500 meters of educational institutes from the primary level up.

The 3rd draft notification of the Prime Minister's Office involves the ban on alcohol consumption at certain places such as state enterprise and government offices and on public transport, except certain special areas such as clubs inside government offices or parties according to tradition.

The last draft involves labels or warning messages for locally manufactured or imported alcohol beverages which stipulates that alcoholic beverage containers must not contain any message that may mislead consumers to believe that the alcoholic beverage is safe, good for health, or is less harmful to health than other alcoholic beverages. The label must not provide direct or indirect advertising and shall have the following statement "Sale of alcohol beverages to a person under the age of 20 years old is prohibited. Violation will be an imprisonment of one year and fine of Baht 20,000".¹³

All of the four drafts have been considered by the National Committee on Alcohol Consumption Control. However, on 24 December 2009, the drafts were reconsidered and therefore could not be announced for immediate enforcement, making us wonder about the seriousness of the policymakers and management.¹⁴

And Finally the Proposed "National Strategy on Solving Problems from Alcohol"

Organizations following this issue recognized the complications of the problems from the impact of alcohol as well as the immense interests that the government and private sectors share from the alcohol business. Therefore, they pushed for the "National Strategy on Solving Problems from Alcohol" to be adopted by the first National Health Assembly (December 2008). This eventually led to the drafting of the "National Alcohol Policy Strategic Plan" within one year, which was later proposed at the second National Health Assembly (December 2009).

Each strategy in the plan consists of clear indicators and has both five-year short-term and ten-year long-term detailed work plans. We must stay tuned on difficulties in enforcing the National Alcohol Policy Strategic Plan and its level of success. (See figure)

