

# Single-Serve Alcoholic Beverages

**Alcohol that is packaged for immediate consumption can lead to public drinking, crime and violence**

## What are Single-Serves?

Alcoholic beverages that are packaged for consumption by a single individual at a given time are known as “single-serves.” These products may contain beer, distilled spirits or alcoholic energy drinks, which, in addition to alcohol, usually contain caffeine as well as other stimulants.<sup>1</sup> However, the most common single-serve items are bottles and cans of beer, ranging in size from 16 to 40 ounces. Such items often have higher alcohol content than regular beer, making them more potent.

## Problematic Packaging

Single-serve alcoholic beverages are considered problematic for a number of reasons. First is that excessive amounts of alcohol are being packaged for consumption by a single individual. This is especially true of the high alcohol content beer known as malt liquor. With 6 percent alcohol content being standard, a 40 ounce bottle of this kind of product is equivalent to five shots of whiskey. Since it sells for as little \$1.39 a bottle, it is the cheapest way for someone to get drunk.<sup>2</sup> This makes it a favorite among the homeless and other serial inebriates, including those receiving public assistance, according to research.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, single-serve products are routinely offered for sale cold and ready to be consumed. This frequently



24 ounce cans of beer are the most common type of single-serve alcoholic beverages being sold in San Bernardino, but 32 and 40 ounce bottles are also found in many supermarkets and convenience stores.

leads to public intoxication and a wide range of associated problems including driving under the influence, public urination, litter, and other disruptive behavior. According to research, such problems are reported on a regular basis by residents living in the proximity of retailers that sell single-serves. In addition, there are also reports of crimes of violence, including gang-related activities, resulting in personal injury and/or property damage.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>

## Underage Drinking

Last but not least, it should be noted that the single-serve cans and bottles of beer are very popular with youth including minorities, to whom these products are specifically marketed. This includes several advertising campaigns featuring African American music video stars promoting malt liquor in 40-ounce containers. In addition, since these products are typically priced low, they are more affordable for young people who have less disposable income.<sup>7, 8</sup> As a consequence, these products may tend to increase problems related to underage drinking. These are known to include poor academic performance, high-risk sexual practices and an increased likelihood of drinking problems developing later in life.<sup>9</sup>

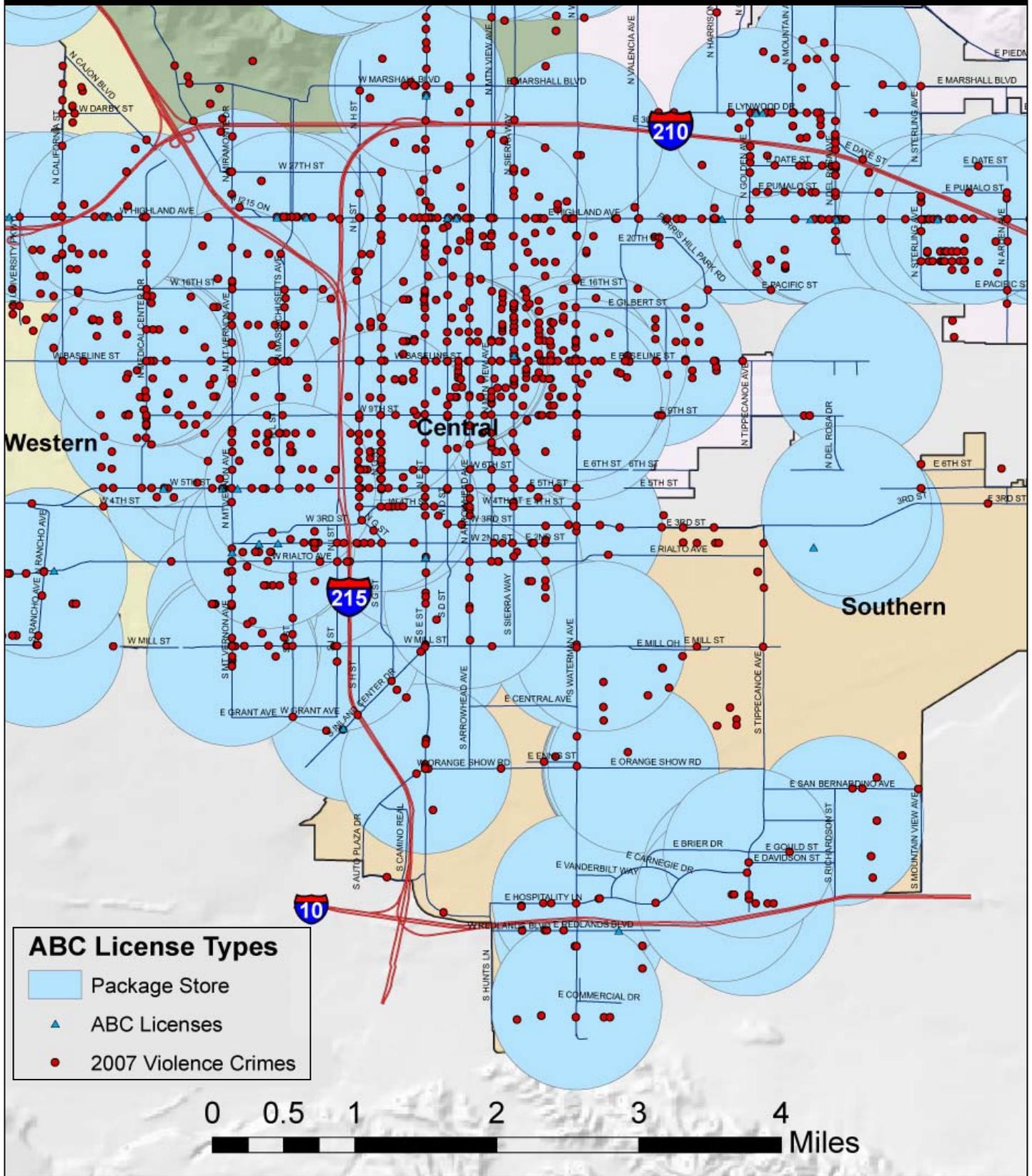
**A 40 ounce bottle of malt liquor is equal to five shots of whiskey.**



Since Hispanic customers prefer lemon with some types of beer, one San Bernardino store offers fresh lemons so that the product can be consumed immediately after purchase. (Sign reads: don't forget the lemons)



City of San Bernardino: Part-1 Violent Crime in Proximity of ABC Licensed Package Stores



GIS mapping of the Central portion of the City of San Bernardino shows how often violent crimes (red dots) occur within a one-half mile radius (indicated by the blue circles) from ABC licensed alcoholic retailers (blue triangles). Data collected by San Bernardino Police Department in 2007. Note: Part-1 crimes are a category of crimes that are generally considered more serious.

## Future Directions

Although sales of single-serve are widespread in San Bernardino, it is actually illegal for some of the city's retailers to be selling products packaged in this way. This is because of restrictions placed on these businesses by the city at the time their alcohol license was issued. Known as a Conditional Use Permit, such regulations are intended to ensure the public's health and safety, and all retailers are required to comply with the restrictions imposed by them. However, as demonstrated by the survey cited previously, at least some of the city's retailers have been failing to meet this obligation.

In response to this problem, the Office of the City Attorney launched an enforcement campaign in May, 2009 to bring local alcohol retailers into compliance with all regulations. This campaign has been successful with cited businesses removing the banned products from their shelves. However, enforcement alone can not solve the problem, as many retailers are exempt from the ban, having been in business before it went into effect. Therefore, public officials feel that additional regulations are needed



After being cited for violating the restriction against selling single serve alcoholic beverages, a local convenience store removed the items from their shelves and posted a sign indicating they were no longer allowed to sell such items.

to deal with problem businesses. These may include a stronger conditional use permitting process for any new businesses and what is known as a "Deemed Approved" ordinance for those already in existence. In addition, there is another initiative currently under way to encourage voluntary removal of single-serve products from the shelves by retailers who are not currently required to do so by the law. Coordinated by the Office of the Mayor through the Operation Phoenix program, such action is expected to reduce crime and improve the local business climate.

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