



Policy Statement

Recommended Policy: Require server training for Special Occasion Permits.

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Grey Bruce Public Health recommends that all Municipal Alcohol Policies (MAPs) include a provision requiring all event organizers, licence holders and all individuals serving or handling alcohol at Special Occasion Permit (SOP) events to have successfully completed a server training program approved by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO).

Purpose

1. To promote responsible service and consumption of alcohol at events held under an SOP and reduce alcohol-related harm, liability risks, and demands on municipal and emergency services.
2. To ensure community members who take on event personnel roles such as bartenders and servers are aware of the personal risks and obligations when serving alcohol under an SOP.
3. To raise awareness among event organizers, special occasion licence holders and event personnel of the potential for charges and/or financial penalties and for individual liability concerns. The AGCO notes that *"Licensees who violate the legal requirements may face an order of monetary penalty, fines, imprisonment, or have their liquor sales licence suspended or revoked. The LLCA also specifically allows for third parties to claim damages against a licensee who sells or serves liquor to an individual in certain circumstances that would lead to harming that individual, other individuals or property."* The *Liquor Licence and Control Act, 2019* includes a schedule of Monetary Penalties related to the Act and its regulations. These fines range up to \$100,000 depending on the infraction.

Rationale

Creating a culture of moderation and safety within the community requires that event organizers, servers, and volunteers possess an understanding of the health impacts, legal responsibilities, and safety risks associated with alcohol consumption.

Recent developments in public health research underscore the increasing evidence of alcohol-related harm. Canada's Guidance on Alcohol, which replaced the 2011 Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines, was developed through an extensive evidence review process. The updated guidance provides current information on the relationship between alcohol use and health risks, advising that consuming **more than two standard drinks per occasion** increases the likelihood of harm to self and others, including injuries and violence.

In the **Grey-Bruce area**, alcohol consumption contributes annually to an estimated **2,450 emergency department visits** for unintentional injuries, **138 motor vehicle collisions**, and **73 deaths**. While data specific to special events is not available, these figures highlight the significant burden of alcohol misuse on local health, emergency, and enforcement services.

Evidence and Benefits of Municipal Alcohol Policies

Implementation and enforcement of MAPs have been associated with a range of community and public health benefits, including:

- A reduction in underage access to alcohol;
- Decrease in community disruption and alcohol-related injuries;
- Fewer impaired driving incidents;
- Enhanced safety at events;
- Reduced demand on police and emergency services;
- Lower costs to taxpayers; and
- Decrease in municipal and organizer liability.

Alignment with Provincial and National Standards

In Ontario, most categories of alcohol licences and permits include a mandatory server training requirement, and all certifications must be renewed every five years. Although SOPs currently do not include this requirement, numerous agencies and policy evaluations have recommended that they do. The Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation Project (2023) identified the need for enhanced server training and recommended recertification every two years to maintain proficiency and public safety.

Implementation

Training recognized by the AGCO, such as Smart Serve Ontario, is widely accessible and cost-effective. Courses are available online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, allowing event organizers and volunteers to complete certification at their convenience.

Supporting Evidence from Community Consultation

Findings from the 2017 Community Alcohol Conversations Project, conducted by Grey Bruce Public Health, identified community support for enhanced training among servers, specifically related to managing intoxicated patrons and handling conflict situations. Participants frequently cited the Smart Serve certification as a valuable educational tool to support responsible service.

Supporting Evidence from Insurance Bureau of Canada

The Insurance Bureau of Canada notes key areas of concern for businesses and organizations holding events where alcohol is served. It is recommended that servers are trained. Anyone involved in the service of alcohol could be held liable for damages or injuries where alcohol is deemed to have been a contributing factor. The Bureau also notes insurance **does not** pay fines.

Supporting Evidence from National Reports

MADD Canada's *Top Ten Report: Municipal Measures to Minimize Impaired Driving and Support Victims and Survivors* (May 2023) emphasizes the importance of requiring server training within Municipal Alcohol Policies.

The report highlights that jurisdictions implementing such requirements experience:

- Reduced vulnerability to civil litigation
- Increased public awareness of responsibilities and liabilities; and
- Measurable reductions in alcohol-related harms, including underage access, impaired driving, and other community risks.

Conclusion

Requiring approved server training for individuals involved in the sale or service of alcohol at SOP events represents a proactive, evidence-based measure to protect public health and safety, reduce liability, and support responsible community events throughout Grey-Bruce.

References:

Canadian Centre on Substance Use in Canada: 2017. [Municipal Alcohol Policy: A Role for Canadian Governments.](#)

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [The Municipal Policy Guide](#) – A practical resource for managing drinking in recreational settings: 2003.

Ontario Health and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). [Burden of Health Conditions Attributable to Smoking and Alcohol by Public Health Unit in Ontario.](#) Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario; 2023.

MADD CANADA. Eric Dumschat, Legal Director, Steve Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer. [THE TOP TEN REPORT](#): Municipal Measures to Minimize Impaired Driving and Support Victims and Survivors: May 2023.

Grey Bruce Public Health (GBPH). Community Alcohol Conversations Project: 2017.

Insurance Bureau of Canada. Liquor Liability. [Risk and crisis management.](#) 2025.

Alcohol Gaming Commission of Ontario. [Schedule of Monetary Penalties Relating to the Liquor Licence and Control Act, 2019 and its Regulations | Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.](#) 2025.