

Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Environmental Scan Data

THC and Alcohol Establishments in Polk, Norman,
and Mahnomen Counties

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Background

The environmental scan was conducted in May and June of 2023 with the intention to find what youth in our area are seeing about THC, and to provide information to county officials and legislators following cannabis legalization.

Alcohol retailers in Polk, Norman, and Mahnomen counties were identified and letters were sent out to alert them that someone from Public Health would be visiting them in the near future. Letters stated that the reason for the visit was to identify if their establishment currently sells any THC-infused products. Information on Responsible Beverage Server Training (RBST) was also distributed.

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The Survey

2023 Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Environmental Scan Assessment

Purpose: The purpose of the environmental scan is to assess retail establishments in Polk, Norman, and Mahnomen Counties that sell beer, cider, wine, and/or liquor. This scan also includes those establishments that sell THC products like edibles and infused beverages. The scan will help local public health departments better understand the marketing youth in the community are exposed to, as well as the ease of access to such products.

Process: Volunteers across Polk, Norman, and Mahnomen Counties will visit retail establishments selling alcohol and document: external and internal signage, location of products within the store, and proximity of the store to places where youth spend time. Volunteers will document what they see using photos (if safe and appropriate to do so) and/or notes.

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The Data: Alcohol Establishments

42 establishments in the scan sold alcohol products (beer, wine, and/or hard liquor).

Notable findings:

- 18 establishments were within 1000 feet of a school or park/playground.
- 36 advertised the sale of alcohol outside their establishment.
- 13 had exterior signage regarding minimum purchase age, while 35 had interior signage regarding purchase age.
- Only 5 had signage related to the health risks of drinking alcohol.

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The Data: THC Establishments

Seven establishments were found to sell THC products (1 liquor store, 1 vape shop, 5 bars/bar and grills). 4/7 sold edibles, 3/7 sold THC-infused beverages, and 1/7 sold other THC products/paraphernalia. One of the seven establishments no longer sells THC products because they were not covered by their insurance and the products did not sell well.

Notable findings:

- 4/7 do no exterior advertising, 2/7 advertise alcohol outside, 2/7 advertise THC products outside.
- THC products are kept behind the counter at all establishments.
- 0 establishments have signage regarding benefits/risks of THC or minimum purchase age for THC.

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Successes

Building Relationships

Most retailers were welcoming and appreciative of the scan. Building and continuing relationships with alcohol and THC retailers will strengthen PNM prevention efforts.

There was also a high interest in RBST, as a value add for the business and to increase positive engagement with public health and law enforcement.

Minimum Purchase Age

Most establishments had clear signage indicating only persons 21 years of age and older are allowed in the bar area and that they check identification.

80% of establishments had interior signage about minimum purchase age of alcohol.

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Areas of Opportunity

- More precise about identifying if the establishment is a bar, a restaurant that sells alcohol or a bar/restaurant
- Increase offerings – Follow up letter to Establishments – Fall 2023
 - Responsible Beverage Server Training (RBST)
- Many questions for the newly formed Office of Cannabis Management came out of this scan, and the answers can be used to inform the next scan.
- Ask the Sheriff's Office on what they are seeing and experiencing regarding crimes related to marijuana, sentencing and what is legal and what is not.
- Share environmental scan data with local boards, law enforcement, county attorney's office and prevention partners (Impact Coalition, Opioid Advisory Council, Towards Zero Deaths Coalition, etc) to inform next steps.

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Future Environmental Scans

- Possibility for an additional scan perhaps 6 months from now
 - Utilize the original scan as our baseline data and then revisit after marijuana officially becomes legal in MN on August 1, 2023.
- Anticipate an increase in sales/availability - reach out to more establishments

Some establishments had a policy that the THC products are only for on-site consumption, while other establishments sell THC products for off-sale only. This question needs to be added to future scans, and conversations will be conducted with establishments on the risks and benefits of one vs the other.

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Further Recommendations

Legislation

We plan to dig deeper into the 300-page bill to be able to provide guidance to retailers. This will also help inform communications efforts.

This will be a constant continued effort as the landscape continues to change. Our staff will work to stay current and make changes as we learn.

Communications

LPH official stance on cannabis is neutral, so we will focus on safe use communication regarding potency and youth safety.

Partners

We will work with local units of government regarding “time, place and manner” and related ordinances, and work with partners on prevention activities.

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