



The Coalition Impact: Environmental Prevention Strategies

Beyond the Basics: Topic-Specific Publications for Coalitions



**Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
National Community Anti-Drug Coalition Institute**

NORTH COASTAL PREVENTION COALITION

The North Coastal Prevention Coalition (NCPC) serving North San Diego County, including the cities of Carlsbad, Oceanside and Vista, Calif., developed a comprehensive plan to address youth marijuana use when assessments revealed that more San Diego County youth smoked marijuana than cigarettes. At the time, the community environment was saturated with pro-drug messages on the radio, in retail stores and at local street fairs. As part of their plan, the coalition collaborated with a countywide initiative called HARM (Health Advocates Rejecting Marijuana) to eliminate messages portraying marijuana use as “fun” and “harmless.”

The county holds about 40 public festivals each year, making the problem visible to the general community, particularly youth. NCPC leaders determined that they could have success in eliminating drug paraphernalia and pro-drug items at local street fairs.

When a music festival, saturated with pro-marijuana messages came to Oceanside, drawing large crowds of youth and young adults, the coalition saw a prime opportunity to document the problem. Coalition members went to the festival and took a collection of photographs they used later to advocate for their position and display the magnitude of the problem.

This visual documentation proved extremely helpful when the coalition approached the city council to amend an existing “headshop” ordinance, to require drug paraphernalia, such as bongs and pipes, to be sold inside licensed

buildings. The city council agreed to the amendment, but the coalition realized this was only part of the problem. The original ordinance did not prevent street vendors from selling and displaying items such as t-shirts, jewelry and posters that sent messages to local youth that could be construed as supporting marijuana use.

The coalition went to the Chamber of Commerce, the sponsor of “Harbor Days,” an annual festival held at the Oceanside Harbor. They believed that if they could compel the “Harbor Days” event planners to change their policies, others might follow. The coalition worked with the Chamber of Commerce to add language to their vendor policy banning vendors from selling “tobacco products, tobacco/drug paraphernalia or any item that promotes the use of illicit substances.” This was a huge success, but many more festivals remained. The coalition had to be creative. Instead of pushing for an ordinance, they decided to get street fair promoters on their side.

One company was responsible for sponsoring most street fairs across North San Diego County. The coalition called the promoters to seek voluntary adoption of a policy against the sale of pro-drug items. As they hoped, the change made by “Harbor Days,” led the promoter to voluntarily ban the pro-drug items from other fairs. These efforts led the coalition to successfully advocate environmental change at 14 fairs throughout the North County. They continue to monitor activity, ensuring that festivals are positive environments for families and youth.

Lessons Learned:

- ☞ **Focus on local policies first.** You do not have to change state laws or create ordinances to make environmental changes. Businesses also have the power to change policies. In this case, the coalition approached street fair promoters, getting them to understand the scope of the problem. They presented pictures and data, helping them to see the value in banning products with pro-drug messages.
- ☞ **Monitor enforcement of policy.** Once a policy change is made, the work is not over because having a policy in writing, does not guarantee enforcement! The NCPC members continue to be the “eyes and ears” at street festivals to ensure that vendors are following the policy. Your coalition may have to take responsibility for such surveillance to guarantee compliance. Law enforcement in communities often is stretched very thin and they appreciate assistance.
- ☞ **Take advantage of windows of opportunity for change.** It often is difficult to mobilize people around a particular issue unless a significant event is involved. These events can be great levers for changing community norms and attitudes and to get people on board with your coalition’s proposed strategies. In this case, one festival helped raise visibility of the problem. Document it. Take pictures and share them with your community through Web-based photo sharing sites such as Flickr.
- ☞ **Make it easy for partners to get on board.** In this case, the coalition went to the street fair promoters with a plan. They told them that the coalition would monitor vendor compliance and would bring this information back to the promoters. The promoters only needed to agree to change the policy language. Offer support to partners. Business people will be more willing to agree to your terms if it does not seem like an extra burden for them.