



AGCO

Alcohol and Gaming
Commission of Ontario

Responsible Service Tip Sheet: **HOUSE POLICIES**

INFORMATION SHEETS FROM THE ALCOHOL AND GAMING COMMISSION OF ONTARIO



House policies offer practical solutions to common problems faced by liquor sales licensees, and can help your establishment remain compliant with Ontario's liquor laws. These policies create a framework within which your servers can operate. With house policies in place, your servers do not have to make difficult judgment calls about who to serve or how to handle a tough situation — they know what to do because their responsibilities and your expectations are clearly spelled out.

Your house policies can also be a useful document to provide to your enforcement inspector, insurer, community groups, and local police. A written policy statement indicates your establishment's responsible serving practices and intention to comply with the law.

The following checklist provides a model to guide you in creating your own house policies. You can modify the list to meet your own specific needs, but three factors are common to all successful policies. In order to be effective, house policies must be *written, communicated to and understood by your staff, and supported by management*. Your staff must know that you will back them up if they deny service to an intoxicated customer or ask an unruly guest to leave.

Remember, house policies are not the law, but rather a list of steps that will help you remain compliant with the *Liquor Licence Act* and Regulations. It is your responsibility as a liquor

sales licensee to ensure you and your staff are informed of the laws and regulations affecting your liquor sales licence.

Some helpful house policies include the following:

1. Monitor your door

- Ensure patrons are of legal drinking age by checking valid government-issued photo ID.
- Provide adequate lighting at the door to allow staff to properly check ID.
- Deny entry to intoxicated people.
- Post a sign indicating that management reserves the right to deny entry to intoxicated and/or underage persons.
- Count the number of people on the premises to prevent overcrowding and exceeding the legal capacity.
- Allow police and enforcement inspectors to freely access the premises.
- Have security or staff at the door periodically check outside of the establishment to maintain order.

2. Actively market food

- Provide a range of food menu selections.
- Offer reduced food prices during late afternoon/evening.
- Have low-cost, low-salt snacks or food at all times.

3. Pricing

- Do not promote drink specials, happy hours or discounts.
- Price non-alcoholic products competitively with alcoholic products.
- Ensure staff are aware of the minimum pricing requirements.

4. Promote alternative beverages

- Set prices for non-alcoholic drinks that are competitive with alcoholic products.
- Promote non-alcoholic drinks on “table tents”.
- Stock and promote light and non-alcoholic beer and wine.
- Set lower prices for light and non-alcoholic beer and wine.
- Evaluate servers on total sales including non-alcoholic products.
- Serve alcohol-free drinks in containers easily distinguishable from alcoholic drinks.

5. Train all staff

- Check that your staff have valid server training certification.
- Meet regularly (weekly, every two weeks) with all staff to identify and address problems, recognize good work, and reinforce your house policies.
- Provide all staff with a copy of the establishment’s house policies.
- Pay staff for training time.
- Keep an incident log of problem situations.
- Regularly review the incident log with all staff.
- Prohibit drinking on the job by all staff and managers.
- Post a list of emergency numbers in a prominent place.
- Ensure staff know procedures in case of an emergency.

6. Adopt a safe transportation plan

- Identify and rank transportation options.
- Confirm necessary arrangements with outside companies.
- Advertise your program.

7. Never serve underage customers

- Verify that all servers are legally old enough to serve beverage alcohol. In Ontario, that is 18 years of age.
- Remind staff that management will back up staff's decision not to serve liquor to people under the age of 19.
- Establish policies on when to ask for identification.
- Train staff on how to identify underage customers.
- Identify what forms of identification are acceptable.
- Provide staff with guidelines to deal with underage customers, including how to recognize and deal with false ID.
- Serve all alcohol-free drinks in containers easily distinguishable from regular alcoholic beverages.

8. Manage the intoxicated customer

- Deny entry to intoxicated customers.
- Ensure staff are aware of the alternative steps to be taken when dealing with an intoxicated customer.
- Reinforce policies by giving staff incentives for effectively discouraging and managing intoxicated customers.

9. Monitor drinking by customers

- Provide staff with guidelines for recognizing the signs of intoxication.
- Deny service to a person showing one or more signs of intoxication.
- Set guidelines for dealing with customers who appear to be intoxicated.
- Limit the number of drinks you will sell to an individual.

10. Market your position

- Explain and market your program internally to customers (use tent cards, posters, etc.). Indicate that you wish no customer to drink to intoxication.
- Promote your position to the public at large.
- Develop a Mission Statement and post it prominently.
- Advise staff that infractions can result in the suspension of the liquor sales licence and can impact on their employment.

Model Mission Statement

"The goal of our establishment is to be successful by providing responsible, courteous and professional service and selling more than just beverage alcohol. We will serve customers in a responsible, friendly and professional manner. Staff are on hand to assist customers in their decision to drink in moderation and, where appropriate, avoid drinking activities that put customers at harm or risk. Management is committed to adhere to all liquor laws."

All managers, licensed security personnel and employees handling liquor must be certified in an AGCO approved server training course. For more information on training for servers, please refer to the **AGCO website**.

For more information, please contact AGCO Customer Service at 416-326-8700 or 1-800-522-2876 (toll-free in Ontario) or visit us online at **www.agco.ca**.