

October 18, 2006

Ben Affleck
LivePlanet
2644 30th Street
Santa Monica, California 90405

Dear Mr. Affleck:

We are writing to ask your help in reducing the promotion of alcoholic beverages to young people, including persons younger than the minimum legal drinking age. We believe that you are ideally situated to make a positive contribution to the health and safety of young people and to the future of this country.

As you may know, Anheuser-Busch (A-B) recently announced its intention to launch in February 2007 an "internet-based entertainment network" to expand brand awareness of its beers. That undertaking will be called "Bud.TV." According to the company, it will feature programming from "exclusive" partners such as your production company, LivePlanet. The announcement of Bud.TV and your association with that venture was widely-reported in the media, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the Associated Press.

As public health and safety professionals in the field of alcohol harm prevention, we are greatly concerned about the introduction of Bud.TV as a means of expanding the promotion of beer to an audience that will undoubtedly include substantial numbers of underage persons. Despite clear evidence that hundreds of thousands of underage internet users already visit Anheuser-Busch's beer web sites, and evidence of the ineffectiveness of the current A-B "honor system" of age verification (which requires only the entry of any birth date), the company plans to inaugurate Bud.TV without adequate age verification technology to deny access to young people who should not be targets of beer promotion. A-B can do better, and we're asking for your support to help keep kids off Bud.TV. Please join us in urging Anheuser-Busch to adopt real age verification technologies that will help limit Bud.TV's audience to the adults A-B claims it intends to reach.

It's no secret that teenagers are among the heaviest internet users and that they visit many sites not intended or appropriate for them. A recent report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (*Teens and Technology*, July 2005) showed that 87 percent of teens, and 94 percent of 11th and 12th graders, use the internet, compared to only 66 percent of adults. 84 percent of teens report going to entertainment Web sites. A March 2004 report by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University revealed the attractiveness of alcoholic-beverage sites to underage youth and the ineffectiveness of age restrictions to those sites. Some sites even have kid-friendly video games. That report showed that about 13 percent of visits to branded alcohol sites were initiated by underage consumers. Moreover, the report found that certain alcohol-related sites attracted a very high percentage of underage "in-depth" visitors—those who viewed more than two pages. For example, 34 percent of in-depth visitors to the Bud Light site were underage, and almost 57 percent of visitors to the Bacardi site were underage.

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Marketers understand well that the internet today is the media playground for youth. A recent report compiled from a survey of young people aged 13 to 24 (a group dubbed the “My Media Generation”) urges marketers to employ interactive media to reach this target demographic with their branding messages. According to the report, the new media environment “brings the promise of new, more powerful channels for reaching young people and having them, willingly and perhaps enthusiastically, engage with your brands.”¹ Bud.TV appears to be modeled on this idea.

Surfing beer sites may lead to trouble. Exposure to alcohol advertising has measurable effects on young people. Not only does alcohol advertising help shape children’s attitudes and expectations about drinking, but recent research suggests that exposure to alcohol ads increases rates of drinking among teens as well as the amounts they drink.

Underage drinking often has severe consequences for young people, who are at high risk for alcohol-related injury or death. Federal government data document that three teens die each day from drinking and driving, and another six youth under 21 die from other alcohol-related causes, such as homicide, suicide, and drowning. The harm from alcohol, of course, is much more widespread. A growing body of evidence suggests that teenage brains, which are still developing, are highly susceptible to the effects of heavier alcohol consumption, which not only impairs cognitive functioning, but also may result in serious long-term damage. It is now well established that people who begin drinking at early ages have a significantly higher risk of becoming alcohol dependent as adults.

We ask that you take these facts into consideration in deciding whether to help us, or deciding whether your production company should be associated with Anheuser-Busch’s new youth-oriented venture at all.

For the sake of the health and safety of our nation’s youth, and for the sake of the integrity of your art, we respectfully ask you to urge Anheuser-Busch to adopt state-of-the-art age verification technology on Bud.TV to help limit site access by underage youth. We also encourage you to reconsider whether a beer site is an appropriate vehicle to distribute and highlight your creative works. Thank you for your consideration.

Please respond to George Hacker, who coordinated this letter, at the Center for Science in the Public Interest (202-777-8343, ghacker@cspinet.org).

On behalf of the endorsing organizations,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Hacker", written over a horizontal line.

George Hacker
Director, Alcohol Policies Project

Enclosure: list of endorsers

¹ Mike Hess and Michele Madansky, “Truly, Madly, Deeply Engaged: Global Youth, Media and Technology,” September 2005.

ENDORSERS

National Organizations

American Council on Alcohol Problems
American Osteopathic Association
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of
America (CADCA)
General Board of Church and Society of
the United Methodist Church
Join Together
Marin Institute
National Association for Children of
Alcoholics
National Association of Peer Programs
National Association of Teen Institutes
National Council on Alcoholism and
Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
National Families in Action and Parent
Corps
Security on Campus

State and Local Organizations

ACT Missouri
Adanta Regional Prevention Center
Alabama Citizens Action Program
Alcohol Policy Network
Alcoholism Council of New York
Behavioral Health Specialists, Inc.
Berkeley Media Studies Group
Christian Civic League of Maine
Cobb Underage Drinking Task Force
Connecticut Coalition to Stop Underage
Drinking
Dare Coalition Against Substance Abuse
Drug-Free Action Alliance
Fasstar Enterprises
Gateway to Prevention & Recovery, Inc.
Georgia Council on Substance Abuse
Healthcare Alternative Systems
Illinois Church Action on Alcohol &
Addiction Problems
Kansas Family Partnership

Maine Association of Prevention
Programs
Missouri Recovery Network
Missouri's Youth/Adult Alliance to
Reduce Underage Drinking
National Council on Alcoholism and
Drug Abuse
National Council on Alcoholism and
Drug Dependence, Hudson County
Inc.
New Mexico Alcohol Issues Consortium
North Coastal Prevention Coalition
North Inland Community Prevention
Program
Northwest Iowa Alcoholism & Drug
Treatment
Obligation
Operation Snowball
Policy Solutions Limited
Positively Spencer Youth Coalition
Prevention First
Prevention Links, Inc.
Project Extra Mile
Rio Grande Safe Communities
San Antonio Fighting Back, Inc.
San Diego County Youth Council
South Orangetown Community
Awareness of Substance Abuse
Student Assistance Services Corp.
Sun Street Centers
Texans Standing Tall
Thagard Student Health Center
The Coalition
Utah Alcohol Policy Coalition
Williamson County Coalition on
Underage Drinking
Youth Leadership Institute
Yu-Can Coalition