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# LAW ENFORCEMENT GUIDE TO FALSE IDENTIFICATION

Prepared by

Pacific Institute

FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

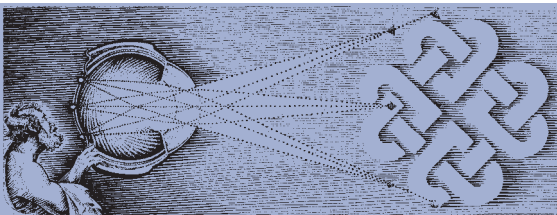
In support of the

**OJJDP *Enforcing the***

***Underage Drinking Laws Program***



# LAW ENFORCEMENT GUIDE TO FALSE IDENTIFICATION



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This guide was originally written by Lieutenant David Myers of the Florida Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco, Captain Mark Willingham of the Center for Tobacco and Alcohol Access Prevention (C-TAAP) in Jacksonville, Florida and Kathryn Stewart of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. New information was added to this document by staff and trainers from the Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

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# Overview

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It happens all too often. While investigating a fatal crash involving an underage drinking driver, a false ID is discovered in the victim's pocket. You wonder if this small piece of white plastic could have contributed to his or her death. Unfortunately, this piece of plastic often is the key to clubs and bars and to alcohol and other age-restricted products that young people see as their way into adulthood. Even more unfortunately, this small piece of plastic often can be the gateway to very tragic consequences.

Many ID fraud experts say the problem of false and fraudulent identification is far worse now than it has ever been. The technology to create false and fraudulent identification is widely available and driven by technologically savvy young people who have mastered the use of this technology.

This guide is intended to provide law enforcement officers with a basic understanding of false and fraudulent identification and provide some of the tools necessary to recognize these forms of identification.



# *How to Use This Guide*

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This guide is intended to acquaint law enforcement officers with the various ways in which false identification can be created, as well as the current technologies for designing identification to thwart forgery or alteration. It describes the techniques and tools that can aid in detecting false identification. It is intended as a companion document to the reference booklets commercially available depicting the driver's licenses and ID cards issued by States and provinces.

Law Enforcement officers can use this publication to:

- Assist in determining if a form of identification is legitimate;
- Assist in training law enforcement officers in methods used to identify false and fraudulent forms of identification; and
- Provide retailers with guidance in detecting false IDs.

This document contains sensitive information and should be **restricted to law enforcement use only**.



# *False Identification*

## Issues and Strategies to Prevent Underage Alcohol Access

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States and communities all over the country are concerned about alcohol use by persons under 21 and are involved with actions to help prevent underage drinking. They recognize that alcohol is the drug most commonly used by young people and that it is an all-too-frequent contributor to injury, death, and criminal behavior among youth. Fortunately, much progress has been made.

The most effective strategies focus on restricting underage access to alcohol, especially retail sales to persons under 21. One common way that young people have of obtaining alcohol is to purchase it in stores or bars. Many communities are cracking down on sales to persons under 21 by implementing vigorous enforcement campaigns to ensure that retailers ask for age identification of young customers and refuse sales to those who are underage or who cannot produce proper identification. These campaigns have been shown to be extremely effective in reducing sales to persons under 21.

Of course, young people can be very creative in their efforts to obtain alcohol. One way they attempt to circumvent minimum purchase age laws is to use false identification. Obtaining a fake ID can be as simple as borrowing the legitimate ID of an older sibling or friend who looks vaguely like the would-be drinker. Crude alterations can also be made to existing IDs to change the date of birth or to substitute the picture. In these days of high quality color copying machines and printers producing excellent forgeries is possible and common. This fact sheet provides an overview of some of the most common types of false IDs and typical sources for them. It also discusses ways that policymakers can reduce the use of false

IDs. Finally, it puts the use and detection of false IDs into perspective as part of an overall approach to reducing underage drinking.

### **How Do Young People Obtain False Identification?**

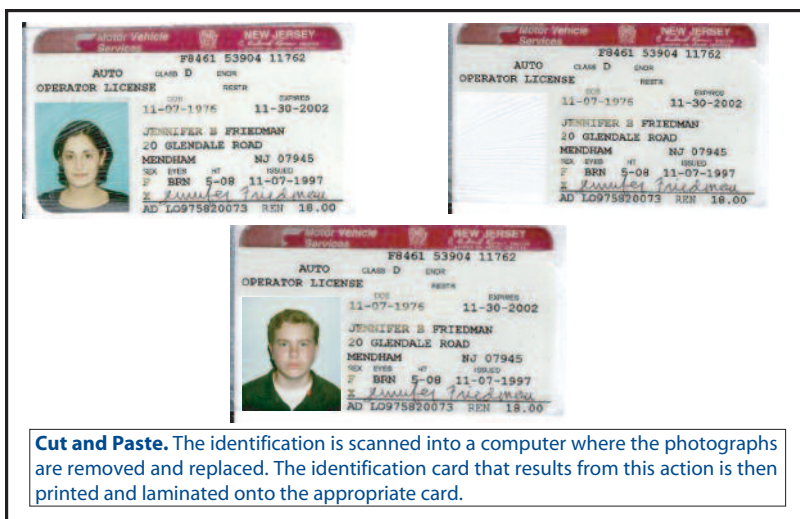
Young people have many potential sources of false IDs. As mentioned above, one simple source is from older siblings or friends who are willing to lend or give their own ID cards to an underage person. A potential underage purchaser can usually count on the fact that any ID will not be closely inspected by a store clerk or alcohol server. If they want a more convincing ID; however, they do not usually have to look far. The internet, for example, provides many Web sites that offer false identifications at the click of a mouse. Sometimes, traveling merchants conduct business out of motel rooms, spreading fliers throughout a campus or community advertising their wares. Young people themselves learn how to use available scanning, printing, and copying technologies to manufacture false identification. With the proliferation of computers and high quality printers and scanners, it has become more difficult to distinguish genuine licenses or other IDs from false ones.

### **What Are the Typical Types of False IDs?**

False IDs fall into three categories: fake, altered, and borrowed.

#### **Fake IDs**

Fake IDs are usually one of two types: driver's licenses or identification cards. Identification cards, often manufactured by mail order firms, may have no legal counterpart, making illegal ones harder to detect. However, they may still contain anomalies which can alert officials to their lack of authenticity. For example, a fake driver's license may be of a different thickness, size, or color. Letter and numbers may be a different typeface. Often counterfeiters spend a lot of time reproducing the front of the card and just photocopy the back, leaving it blurry or dark.



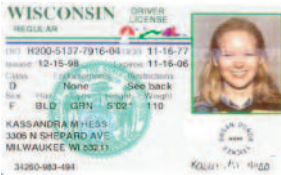
## Altered IDs

Altered IDs may show signs of tampering in several places, such as numbers, photograph, and laminate. The birth date, driver's license number, height, and weight may be scratched out, blurred or inked over. A photograph may have been inserted over the original, which may partially cover the state seal. Changes in the laminate may indicate tampering. If the glue lines or edges appear rough, especially near the photograph, it may indicate it was pried apart and then resealed.

## Borrowed IDs

Persons under 21 will often borrow identification from those who can drink legally. Although appearances may change, even subtle differences between the individual presenting the ID and the photograph or physical description on the card should be questioned. Also included in this category are duplicate or expired cards. An expired driver's license or one marked 'DUPL' may not belong to the person presenting it.

## ISSUED



## COPY



**Copy Process.** To detect copies, start by looking at the blending of colors. The colors should be crisp, sharp, and very distinctive. Also look at the ink used in the printing. Ink used in legitimate forms of identification should not bleed onto other colors or parts of the card.

## How Are False IDs Created?

False identification can be created by altering an existing ID card to change the birth date or identity of the person to whom the ID was legitimately issued, or it can be created from scratch. Some typical manufacturing techniques include:

- Scanning a legitimate ID into a computer and replacing the photograph or birth date. The resulting ID is printed and laminated to resemble a true ID.
- Copying an existing ID with a color copy machine and laminating the copy (with new identity or birth date information) onto card stock that resembles that used by the State of the false ID.

- Counterfeiting an exact reproduction of a legitimate ID, sometimes using the same (often stolen) materials used by the State of the false ID.

Any of these and numerous other methods can result in an ID that looks real to the casual observer. In some cases, there are telltale signs that are apparent on close inspection.

### **What Can be Done to Curtail the Manufacturers of False Identification?**

Vigorous pursuit and prosecution of the manufacturers of false identifications is uncommon. The nature of laws against this behavior, the ease of manufacture, and the fact that manufacturers are often located in States other than the ones for which the identification is produced make enforcement difficult. This problem is one that should be given serious consideration by policymakers.

### **How Can Identification be Designed to Reduce Fraudulent Use?**

States have incorporated a variety of features to make alteration of existing IDs or manufacture of false IDs more difficult or easier to detect. Some of these methods include:

- **Obviously different design of IDs for underage people.** Some states make the background, layout, or photo appearance very different for IDs issued to people under 21. For example, licenses of underage drivers are a different color or the picture is in profile rather than full face. Such designs make it easier for clerks or bartenders to see if a potential buyer is under 21 without calculating the age. These designs also make it unproductive to alter the birth date as a way of falsifying the ID.
- **Incorporation of ghost images or holograms in the ID design.** A ghost image or hologram in the ID design makes it more difficult to create convincing copies. The technology for reproducing these images is more expensive and harder to employ than simple scanners or color copiers.
- **Use of pictures on the back that are discernible only in ultra-violet light.** Some States have added a State picture on the back of



**A hologram** is designed so that it will appear in a three dimensional (3D) state and totally disappear when rotated. Holograms will be damaged if altered. It is rare for a counterfeiter to copy the actual hologram in use by a State. The words “secure” or “genuine” or the “lock and key” hologram designs are the most popular false holograms in use today. No states use these designs in their legitimate identification.

the driver’s license, which is visible only under ultraviolet light. Since the image is invisible in normal lighting conditions, it will often be overlooked by potential counterfeiters or be impossible to duplicate.

- **The use of magnetic strips or bar codes.** Many States now incorporate a magnetic strip or bar code on the back of drivers’ licenses and ID cards that encodes information about the cardholder. Information encoded often includes name, address, date of birth, driver’s license number, and expiration date. Sometimes, simple visual inspection of these strips or bar codes can help in the detection of a false ID. The color or location may appear different than on a legitimate ID or, in the case of magnetic strips, the strip may be covered by plastic laminate used in the creation of the false ID.

Obviously, these design features are most useful if ID checking machines are commonly used by alcohol outlets. These machines, which are similar to those used almost universally to register credit card purchases, can provide instantly the true name, birth date, and age of the person to whom the ID was issued. IDs that have been fraudulently manufactured may not register this information at all, thus alerting the alcohol seller that the ID is false.

## What Can Retailers, Servers and Sellers Do to Prevent Sales to Persons Under 21 Using False IDs?

There are several ways that retailers, servers and sellers can avoid illegal sales to persons under 21. Each of these strategies requires a commitment by management to preventing sales to underage purchasers, the establishment of strict policies, and the communication and reinforcement of these policies with line staff.

The most important action that retailers, servers and sellers can take to reduce sales to persons under 21 is to *demand identification from young-looking customers consistently and conscientiously*. All too often, young people are able to buy alcohol without any identification at all.

Retailers, servers and sellers should *check the birth date to make sure that the customer is 21 or older*. Just because you ask for ID and the presenter shows it to you do not assume that the presenter is old enough to

### Telltale Signs of False Identification

- Picture does not resemble bearer
- Bearer cannot quickly state birth date or address
- Bearer's signature does not match signature on identification
- Driver's license does not match a legitimate sample (Compare to the one in your own wallet!)
- Lamination seems too thick or has cuts or overlays
- Lamination has air bubbles, peeled back corner or faulty re-sealing
- Quality of print is poor or indistinct
- Holograms or ghost images do not appear of high quality
- Magnetic strip is covered by plastic laminate
- State seal or camera number is partially covered by photo or has been altered
- Lettering does not match or appears altered
- ID is expired
- Check for numbers that have been scratched, bleached out and inked over, or cut out and reinserted

purchase just because they presented an ID. In a surprising number of cases, sales are actually made to customers who present IDs clearly indicating that they are underage.

Retailers, servers and sellers should *examine the identification closely* to rule out obvious fakes, crude alterations, or an ID that actually belongs to someone else.

If a retailer suspects the ID is fake, they should ask for a second ID, preferably with a photograph. Sometimes even simple questions can reveal frauds, such as asking the middle name or zip code. The retailer can request the customer to sign his/her name and compare the signature to the one on the ID.

If still in doubt to the authenticity of the ID then refuse service. Most states protect sellers and servers who refuse service to someone they think may be underage. As long as you can articulate reasonableness in your decision to refuse service other than discrimination most states protect retailers, sellers and servers from litigation. Check with local authorities in your area as to laws, rules and regulations that pertain to underage sales of alcohol and refusal of service.

Just taking the steps listed above will prevent sales to a significant number of underage buyers. Even more importantly, once a retailer has the reputation for checking identification carefully, many underage buyers will be less inclined to attempt a purchase at that location.

In states that use barcodes or magnetic strips on IDs, retailers can take an additional step by *obtaining and consistently using an ID checking machine to detect false IDs*. These machines require an initial investment, but can be useful in deterring young people from attempting to buy alcohol and in detecting and rejecting false IDs. The ID checking machines are only as good as the seller or server using the machine and are not foolproof. The machine may show the ID to be perfectly valid however if the machine user does also check the photograph to see that the presenter is actually the person displayed on the ID then the machine is useless for the purpose intended. So check the photograph first and if the bearer reasonably

appears to be the person depicted in the photograph then proceed to the use of the ID checking machine. Also, there are stores that have computer systems which require the birth date to be entered into the system for an alcohol purchase. Again, this mechanism is only as good as its user and retail establishments should make it known that overriding such systems is against company policy.

### **How Can States and Communities Include False IDs in Their Overall Approach to Reducing Underage Alcohol Access?**

Communities concerned about underage drinking should establish a comprehensive approach to reducing alcohol access. There are many effective strategies, and preventing the use of false identification is only one of them. (See Resources at the end of this booklet for sources of information on a range of important strategies.) Furthermore, communities should keep in mind that many false IDs will go undetected, especially with the level of technology currently available. The fact that successful purchases will still be made using a false ID should not discourage communities from making the effort.

The best way to reduce underage drinking is to establish a strong community norm against underage drinking that makes it clear to young people and those who would abet them in obtaining alcohol that such behavior is unacceptable and is likely to result in negative consequences. A strong community norm and concerns about consequences will deter many people from even attempting to engage in illegal behavior. Preventing the manufacture and use of false identification is one way of reinforcing that norm.

Keeping in mind that dealing with false identification is just one element of an overall approach to underage access to alcohol, some key strategies can be highlighted:

- Make sure that the design of identification used in the state clearly indicates whether the individual is under 21. The seller or server should not have to do the math to determine the potential customer's age.

- Incorporate design features (such as holograms) in identification that make alteration and counterfeiting more difficult.
- Incorporate a magnetic strip or bar code that encodes key information about the ID holder.
- Encourage or require the use of ID checking machines in establishments that sell alcohol.
- Establish and enforce penalties against the manufacturers of false identification.
- Establish and enforce penalties against people who attempt to use false identification.

## *Conclusions*

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Underage drinking poses a serious threat to the health and safety of young people and the community as a whole. Investing time, resources, and energy into a range of strategies to prevent underage access to alcohol has been shown to have important payoffs in protecting youth and enhancing the community environment. Establishing and acting on appropriate policies concerning false identification are an important part of a comprehensive approach to preventing underage drinking.

# References

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Other Enforcement Operations Guides in the Series:

*Enforcing Impaired Driving Law for Youth*

*Reducing Alcohol Sales to Underage Purchasers: A Practical Guide to Compliance Investigations*

*Strategies for Reducing Third-Party Transactions of Alcohol to Underage Youth*

*Preventing and Dispersing Underage Drinking Parties*

*Law Enforcement and Higher Education: Finding Common Ground to Address Underage Drinking on Campus*

Other Publications of the Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center:

*How to Use Local Regulatory and Land Use Powers to Prevent Underage Drinking*

*Strategies to Reduce Underage Alcohol Use: Typology and Brief Overview*

*Guide to Conducting Alcohol Purchase Surveys*

*Guide to Conducting Youth Surveys*

*Strategic Media Advocacy for Enforcement of Underage Drinking Laws*

*Regulatory Strategies for Preventing Youth Access to Alcohol: Best Practices*

*Costs of Underage Drinking, Updated Edition*

*Preventing Sales of Alcohol to Minors: What You Should Know About Merchant Education Programs*

*Guide to Responsible Alcohol Sales: Off-Premise Clerk, Licensee, and Manager Training*

*Environmental Strategies to Prevent Alcohol Problems on College Campuses*

*A Guide to Zero Tolerance and Graduated Licensing: Two Strategies that Work*

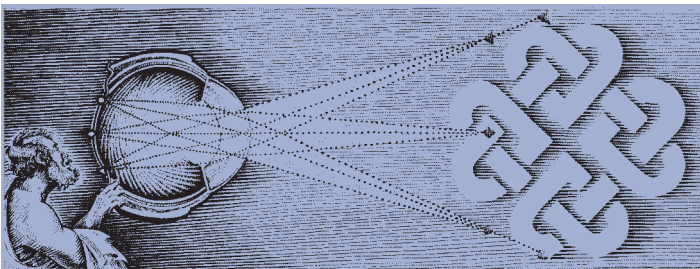
*Tips for Soliciting Cohesive Enforcement Program Plans*

*Comparison of Drinking Rates and Problems: European Countries and the United States*

*Underage Alcohol Use on College Campuses: The Role of the Environment*

*A Guide to Evaluating Prevention Effectiveness*

These publications were prepared by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in support of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws Program. They can be accessed online at [www.udetc.org](http://www.udetc.org).



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