

Code of Ethics
of the Alcoholic Beverage
Industry in Quebec

ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF ÉDUC'ALCOOL MEMBERS

Introduction

Alcohol has always been part of the human landscape. In all our social and cultural references, it is associated with the values of conviviality, responsibility and even health. Created essentially as something good and beneficial, alcohol is an integral part of many human rituals. It served Louis Pasteur in his scientific work and, of course, is mentioned frequently in the Bible. “Wine and music rejoice the heart,” says the Book of Ecclesiasticus (40:20), followed immediately by “but the love of wisdom is above them both,” indicating that even the Ancients understood that moderation was always in good taste! Clearly, the fact that some people abuse alcohol should not tarnish the reputation of the product itself.

Throughout time and around the world, drinking habits have followed the laws of the market; more importantly, however, they have fluctuated with changes in the sociocultural system that reflects the individual and collective values of a given society. From this perspective, alcohol may be seen for what it is – a cultural product associated with life’s pleasures – whereas its abuse causes it to be perceived as a health menace and source of criminal behaviour.

Therein lies the difficulty in defining our relationship to alcohol. For Quebecers, that relationship has always been open, yet complex and sometimes contradictory. And while, as a society, we managed to escape the wave of prohibition that swept North America in the early 20th century, we have not been spared the questioning and public debates that still surround the issue of drinking.

Some positions make no distinction between drinking and abuse. Alcohol is seen only as a potential danger from which people must be protected. A few go so far as to suggest that people must be protected from themselves.

The fact remains that more than 80 percent of Quebecers drink alcohol in one form or another, and only a tiny proportion of them have a drinking problem. The vast majority of drinkers have no problem at all. On the contrary, they enjoy the qualities and benefits of alcohol, and the way it contributes to creating a warm, convivial environment.

The original version of the Code of Ethics is in French. In case of difference between the English and French versions, and for all matters regarding interpretation, the French version shall prevail.

We recognize that alcohol abuse and misuse can lead to dependence. And no doubt there is but a fine line between the joys of moderation and the problems of excess. That is why Éduc'alcool promotes the culture of taste and moderation (as opposed to the culture of drunkenness), consumer education, and accountability on the part of individuals and the alcoholic beverage industry.

Guiding Values and Principles

The Code of Ethics of the Alcoholic Beverage Industry in Quebec is guided by the following values and principles:

Value

1. Alcohol is a consumer product that has been a cultural staple in most societies for centuries. Misuse is what casts it in a negative light.
2. Alcohol is accepted within our society and is a part of our lifestyle.
3. There is such a thing as a safe level of alcohol consumption.
4. Alcohol is a psychoactive substance that can create a dependency.
5. Abusive drinking has harmful effects on the drinkers, their friends and families, and society at large.
6. It is in the greater interest of the alcoholic beverage industry to have “quality” customers, as opposed to “quantity” customers.

Principles

1. It is legitimate to sell and promote alcoholic beverages under clearly specified rules and regulations.
2. The alcoholic beverage industry has social responsibilities, which it must assume without reservation.
3. Statutes, regulations and the Code of Ethics must be respected with honesty and integrity, and applied justly and equitably.
4. Quebecers deserve to be treated like adults who are responsible for their individual choices.

Preamble

The members of the alcoholic beverage industry in Quebec agree to:

1. Comply with all statutes and regulations governing the marketing, sale and promotion of alcoholic beverages. This Code of Ethics is not a substitute for such statutes and regulations: it states the standards the industry has set for itself.
2. Comply with this Code of Ethics and modify it on a regular basis in accordance with the changing needs of Quebec society.
3. Deal in a fair and equitable fashion with all individuals, companies and organizations that do not comply with the Code of Ethics.
4. Regularly make public any decisions concerning the compliance or non-compliance of commercial, promotional or advertising activities, as regards the application of this Code of Ethics.

1. Field of Application

The Code of Ethics is a declaration of principle. Companies and individuals that market, promote or sell alcoholic beverages choose voluntarily to comply with it.

Nevertheless, the standards established herein shall serve as a benchmark for determining the ethics of all manufacturers, promoters or retailers of alcoholic beverages, whether or not they have chosen to comply with the Code.

2. Rules of Ethics

A. Packaging and commercial communications

1. Alcohol content shall in no way appear as a dominant feature on packaging or in communications as a means to encourage consumption.
2. Neither packaging nor communications shall associate the product with any act of provocation, violence or asocial behaviour.
3. Neither packaging nor communications shall associate the product in any way with any illicit substance.
4. Neither packaging nor communications shall in any way be sexist, or associate the product with sexual performance, or imply that it will enhance sexual prowess or attractiveness.
5. Neither packaging nor communications shall in any way imply that drinking is an indicator of, or contributor to, social success or popularity.
6. Neither packaging nor communications shall in any way imply that drinking improves physical or intellectual abilities or has health benefits.
7. Neither packaging nor communications shall in any way encourage or promote alcohol abuse, the pursuit of intoxication, drinking games, or driving while intoxicated.

8. Neither packaging nor communications shall have any particular attraction for people under the age of 18.
9. Neither packaging nor communications shall contain any images of people who look younger than 25, unless it is perfectly clear that they have not been drinking, are not drinking and are not about to drink.
10. Neither packaging nor communications shall devalue, show disrespect for or ridicule people who choose not to drink on occasion or who have chosen not to drink at all.

B. Marketing and communication targets

Whatever the location or media involved:

1. No advertising communication or promotional activity shall target young people under the age of 18.
2. No advertising communication or promotional activity shall target people who are intoxicated.
3. No advertising communication or promotional activity shall target individuals or groups who are at risk for dependency.
4. No advertising communication or promotional activity shall target vulnerable individuals with limited financial or psychological resources.
5. No advertising communication or promotional activity shall illustrate or focus on situations or locations where it is dangerous or imprudent to drink alcohol.

C. Commercial and promotional practices

Whatever the location or media involved, commercial and promotional practices shall comply with the following:

1. Discounts, promotional offers and commercial practices shall under no circumstances incite people to drink excessively or quickly.
2. Excessive promotional offers and discounts shall be prohibited.
3. The Éduc'alcool slogan (*Moderation is always in good taste*) shall appear clearly and legibly on advertising materials.

3. Violations of the Code

1. Any person or company, including any enterprise operating in the alcoholic beverage industry, residing or doing business in Quebec, may file a complaint under this Code of Ethics.
2. Complaints shall be submitted to an independent five-member Ethics Council. Éduc'alcool shall name the Council chairperson, who shall select the four other members. The Ethics Council shall assess the relevance of all complaints submitted and determine whether the activity or product in question is in compliance with the Code of Ethics.
3. Any person or company named in the complaint shall have an opportunity to rebut the charges, according to a protocol to be determined by the Ethics Council.
4. If the person or company is found to be in violation of the Code, the Ethics Council shall set a time limit within which specific corrective action is to be taken, unless it is a repeat offense.
5. If the person or company complies with the Ethics Council's instructions, there shall be no public reprimand.
6. If the person or company does not follow the Ethics Council's instructions, the Council shall be free to publicize the brand and activities concerned.

7. However, the Ethics Council may, at its discretion, publicly reprimand any repeat offender, without offering the person or company an opportunity to take corrective action.
8. All parties involved shall be notified of the Ethics Council's decisions.
9. The Ethics Council shall then make its decisions public.

4. Compliance with Statutes and Regulations

In order to ensure compliance with the statutes and regulations of Quebec, the Ethics Council shall inform all plaintiffs, upon receipt of the complaint, of the possibility of also filing a complaint with the *Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux*.

For its part, the *Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux* shall communicate to the Ethics Council the decisions it renders, so that the Council may examine them in light of the Code of Ethics.

Complaints may be submitted to the Ethics Council by regular mail, e-mail or fax. When filing a complaint, please provide all relevant details, enclose a photo, if possible, make sure the advertiser or manufacturer in question is clearly identified, and include your name, full mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address.

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