





# LIQUOR STORES AND COMMUNITY HEALTH



*A liquor store across the street from Nystrom Elementary School in Richmond*

**A**n eighth grade Helms Middle School student sets out on his ten-block walk to school. He has an assignment to track what he sees on his walk. A block from his home, he stops at the first store to buy something to drink—it is a liquor store. He leaves with a soda. He has barely begun drinking it before he reaches the next liquor store. He decides to buy a soda at every liquor store he passes as an indicator of how prevalent these stores are in his neighborhood. He continues his walk to school. He does not go into a few of the liquor stores because he is nervous about the activity happening in front of them. By the time he gets to school, he has collected six soda cans over just ten blocks.<sup>1</sup>

High exposure to liquor stores and the easy availability of alcohol in the community affects this San Pablo eighth grader and the public health, safety, and quality of life of his community. On his walk to school, he may be exposed to public drunkenness, harassment of passers-by, and criminal activities—like gambling, prostitution, and drug dealing—that contribute to an environment of social disorder around many liquor stores. At the community level, these stores can act as magnets for crime and violence and expose residents to potential harm.

A high density of liquor stores can contribute to a variety of health and safety problems. Studies show that neighborhoods with higher concentrations of liquor stores also have higher rates of alcohol-related hospitalizations, drunk driving accidents, and pedestrian injuries.<sup>2,3</sup>

A recent study across all California zip codes found that neighborhoods with a higher density of liquor stores had higher numbers of childhood accidents, assaults, and child abuse injuries.<sup>4</sup> Liquor stores become places where social controls are weaker, increasing the likelihood of criminal and nuisance activities.<sup>5</sup> A high density of liquor stores is linked to higher levels of crime and violence.<sup>6,7,8</sup> A study conducted in Los Angeles found that each new liquor store in a neighborhood resulted in 3.4 more assaults per year.<sup>9</sup> In New Jersey, researchers found that the number of liquor stores was the single most important environmental predictor of why some neighborhoods have higher crime rates than others—a stronger predictor than unemployment rate or median household income.<sup>10</sup>

Since merchants often use storefronts to advertise alcohol products, the concentration of liquor stores also influences the amount of alcohol advertising in a community. This advertising can have a powerful impact over time, especially when the advertisements are located in areas where youth often congregate or pass by. Exposure to alcohol advertising on television has been related to youth having positive attitudes about the social uses of alcohol.<sup>11, 12</sup> The influence of this advertisement is especially troubling for youth whose immediate physical and social environments are dominated by liquor stores and alcohol advertisements.

This high concentration of liquor stores and outdoor alcohol advertising disproportionately affects low-income communities of color. Research shows that black people face higher exposure to liquor stores in their neighborhoods than do white people, and similarly nonwhite youth live in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of liquor stores than white youth.<sup>13, 14</sup> For example, a

study found that West Oakland—home to predominantly people of color—contains one liquor store for every 298 residents, while the largely white neighborhood of Piedmont has one liquor store for every 3,000 residents.<sup>15</sup> As a result, communities like West Oakland tend to have far more access to liquor stores and alcohol than to grocery stores and fresh produce.

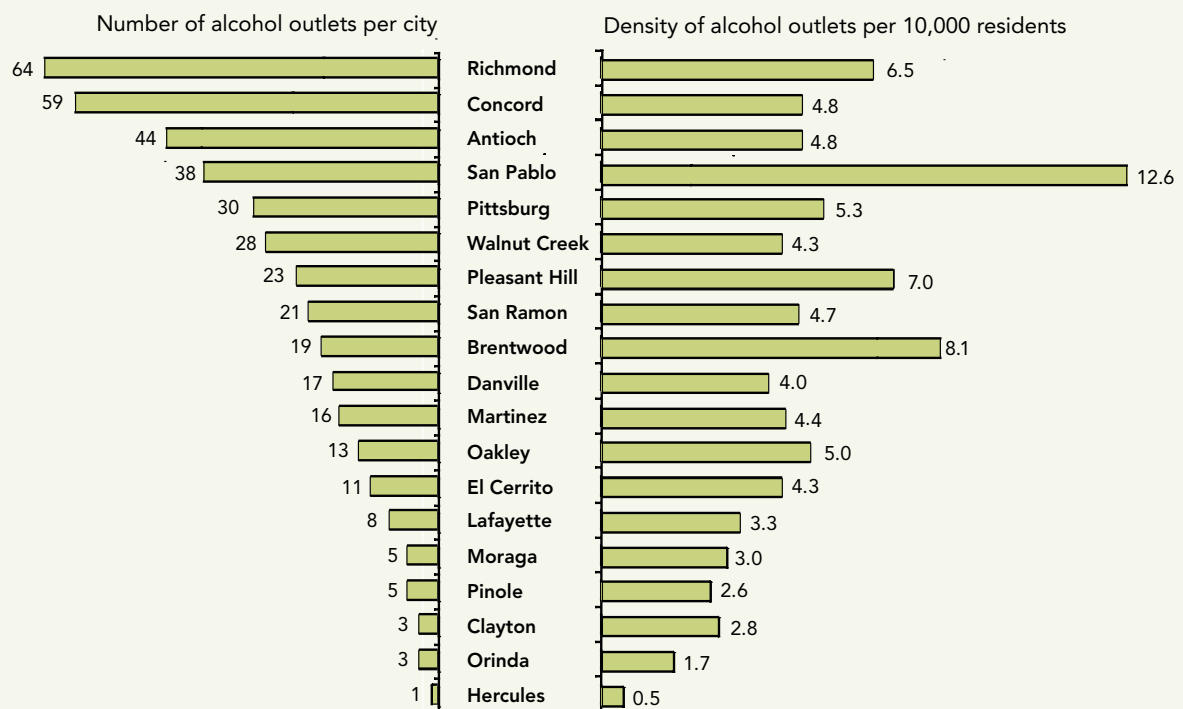
A high density of liquor stores also contributes to economic and social disintegration.<sup>16</sup> Similar to power plants and refineries, alcohol outlets represent a form of locally unwanted land use that conflicts with desirable land uses such as schools, parks, and residences. The over-concentration of liquor stores increases the perceived lack of safety and limits walkability in the community. Moreover, concentrations of liquor stores in a neighborhood can constrain economic opportunities for current and new businesses and therefore are both a symptom and accelerator of economic decline.

## WHAT DID OUR RESEARCH FIND?

We looked at two indicators of youth and resident exposure to liquor stores: 1) liquor store density and 2) proximity of liquor stores to schools or parks. We looked only at alcohol outlets that are not grocery stores and that sell liquor for consumption off the premises. Similar to

most of the studies cited above, we did not look at full-service grocery stores that sell alcohol, as these stores do not present the same types of risks (easy access to liquor, storefront advertising) as liquor stores.

**Figure 1. NUMBER AND DENSITY OF ALCOHOL OUTLETS PER CITY, CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, 2006<sup>17,18</sup>**



Total off-site outlets in cities in Contra Costa County: 408

### Liquor Store Density

This indicator examines the number of liquor stores in an area in relation to the size of the population that lives there. It allows us to compare the density of liquor stores across Contra Costa communities of varying populations and determine the communities that have the highest concentrations.

### Richmond and San Pablo have 25% of Contra Costa County's liquor stores, but less than 14% of its population.

Figure 1 shows the number and density of alcohol outlets within each Contra Costa County city. The cities of Richmond, Concord, Antioch, and San Pablo have the most liquor stores. San Pablo and Richmond neighborhoods—comprised mostly of people of color (84% and 79% respectively)—have 12.6 and 6.5 liquor stores for every 10,000 residents. In contrast, neighboring Orinda and Lafayette—both 16% people of color—have 1.7 and 3.3 liquor stores for every 10,000 residents, respectively. In fact, Richmond and San Pablo are home to a quarter

(25%) of Contra Costa County's liquor stores, but represent less than 14% of the county population.

### Proximity of Liquor Stores to Schools and Parks

Land-use compatibility is an important component of the well-being and health of communities. Liquor stores in close proximity to schools and parks expose youth to the negative effects of alcohol outlets and advertising. This indicator measures the number of liquor stores within 1,000 feet of a school or park.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 2 shows the proximity of liquor stores to schools and parks in West County neighborhoods. Each school and park is encircled by a 1,000-foot radius (or buffer) to determine whether liquor stores are located within short walking distance. Almost 60% of West County schools and parks are within 1,000 feet of a liquor store. In fact, roughly 30% of parks and schools in West County are within 1,000 feet of two or more liquor stores.

Table 1 shows, for each city in Contra Costa County (excluding the cities with zero liquor stores), the number of liquor stores located within 1,000 feet of any park or school, along with the median household income and the percentage of residents of color.

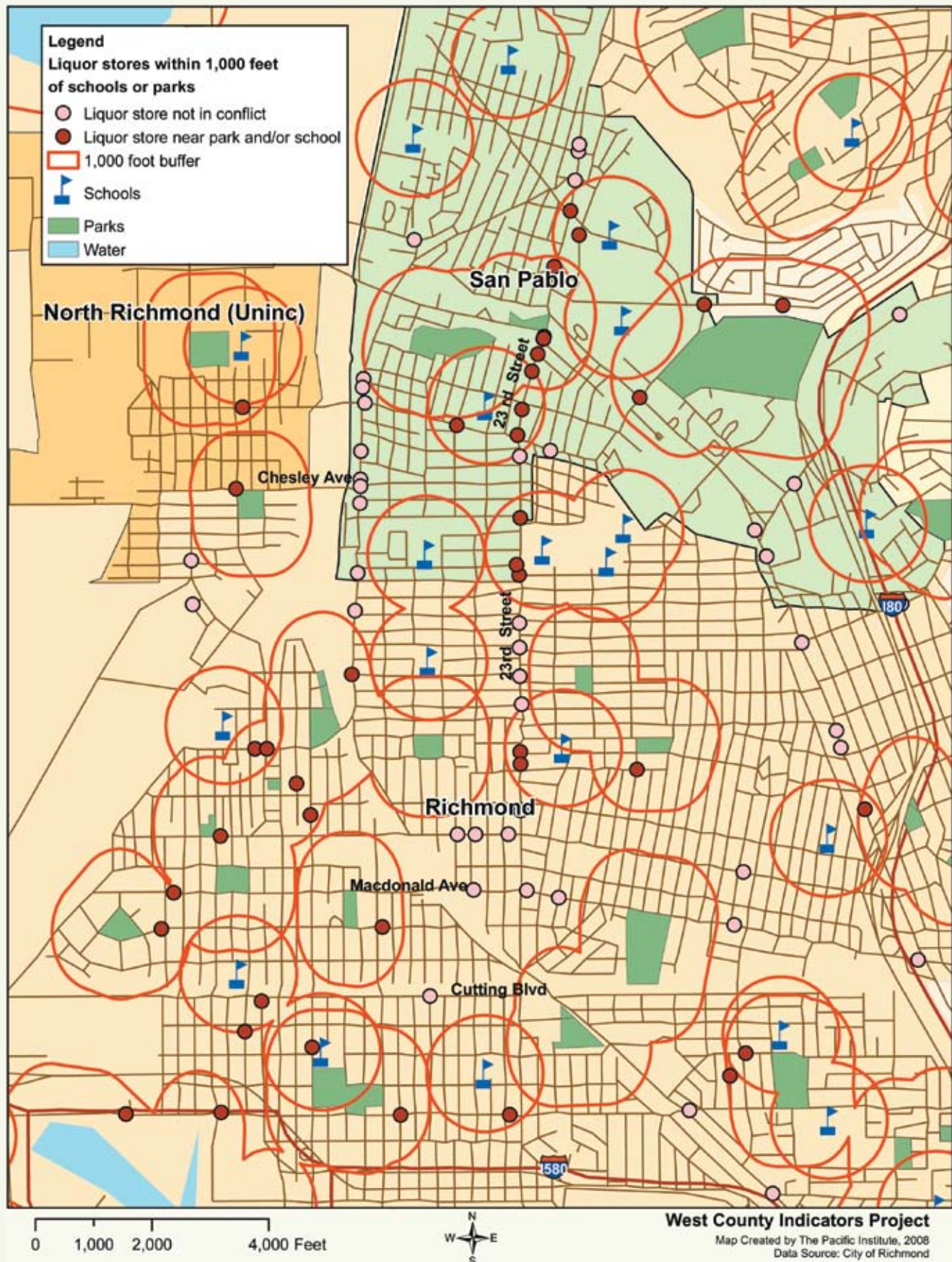
**Table 1. CITIES WITH ONE OR MORE LIQUOR STORE WITHIN 1,000 FEET OF ANY PARK OR SCHOOL, CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, 2006**

City	Liquor stores within 1,000 ft of a park or school	Total liquor stores in city	Median Household Income (Census 2000)	Percent People of Color (Census 2000)
Moraga	1	5	\$ 98,080	22%
Pinole	2	5	\$ 62,256	52%
San Ramon	2	21	\$ 95,856	28%
Danville	3	17	\$ 114,064	17%
El Cerrito	2	11	\$ 57,253	46%
Lafayette	3	8	\$ 102,107	16%
Pleasant Hill	4	23	\$ 67,489	23%
Brentwood	5	19	\$ 69,198	37%
Walnut Creek	5	28	\$ 63,238	19%
Pittsburg	6	30	\$ 50,557	69%
Antioch	7	44	\$ 60,359	44%
Martinez	8	16	\$ 63,010	24%
San Pablo	14	38	\$ 37,184	84%
Concord	20	59	\$ 55,597	39%
Richmond	25	64	\$ 44,210	79%
Contra Costa County	113	388	\$ 63,675	37%

Note: Cities not listed were found to have zero liquor stores near schools or parks.



**Figure 2. PROXIMITY OF LIQUOR STORES TO SCHOOLS OR PARKS IN WEST COUNTY NEIGHBORHOODS, 2006**





## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR WEST COUNTY?

When we step back and compare the cities of Richmond and San Pablo to the surrounding county, we find that an unusually high number of schools and parks in these cities are within a short walking distance of a liquor store. The five cities with the highest numbers of liquor stores near parks and schools all have median household income below the county median of \$63,675.

It is evident that West County youth have far more liquor stores within their immediate environment compared to the rest of the county. In fact, 39 of the 113 (35%) liquor stores within 1,000 feet of a school or park in Contra Costa County are located within the cities of Richmond and San Pablo—the two cities in Contra Costa County with the highest percentage of nonwhite residents.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

In California, like many others states, the rules on issuing and revoking licenses to sell alcohol are set by the State; however, local governments have authority to regulate land use to protect the health, welfare, and safety of citizens. Many municipalities, including the cities of San Pablo<sup>20</sup> and Richmond,<sup>21</sup> have zoning ordinances in place that restrict the development of new liquor stores by enforcing minimum distance requirements either between outlets or between liquor stores and schools or parks. While these ordinances are successful at preventing the

establishment of new liquor stores, they do not address the health and safety problems associated with existing ones. Below are successful approaches carried out by other cities across the state designed to address existing liquor stores in their communities:

### **Enforce property maintenance and environmental design guidelines of liquor stores, particularly those in close proximity of schools and parks.**

Environmental Prevention in Communities (EPIC) carried out a youth-driven survey of liquor stores in the city of Oakland. The survey assessed the number of outlets that were not in compliance with environmental design guidelines of the city. Results provided evidence for enforcement of design standards, including restrictions on storefront liquor advertising.<sup>22</sup>

### **Assist with conversion of liquor stores to other retail that meets community needs, such as access to healthy food.**

Because many liquor stores are also independently owned corner stores, they can transition to other forms of retail that are greater assets to the neighborhood. To facilitate this transition, cities and counties could provide redevelopment dollars, credit for repair and loans, and business plan development assistance.<sup>23</sup>

### **Enforce ordinances to restrict nuisance activities around liquor stores.**

Both the City of Oakland and the City of San Francisco passed legislation that strengthens local control and holds liquor store owners accountable for addressing nuisance and crime issues connected to their stores, such as litter, loitering and graffiti, assault, and prostitution.<sup>24</sup> Liquor store permits are revoked if proof of serious issues is obtained and violations persist.



*Students walk home from Peres Elementary School in Richmond.*

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION AND CHANGE

### California Department of Alcohol Beverage Control

[www.abc.ca.gov](http://www.abc.ca.gov)

The Department of Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) is the state agency responsible for “the protection of the safety, welfare, health, peace, and morals of the people of the State, to eliminate the evils of unlicensed and unlawful manufacture, selling, and disposing of alcoholic beverages, and to promote temperance in the use and consumption of alcoholic beverages... (for) the economic, social, and moral well-being and the safety of the State and of all its people.”

### City of Richmond City Council Meetings

[www.ci.richmond.ca.us/index.asp?NID=29](http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/index.asp?NID=29)

Meetings are held on the first and third Tuesday of every month at City Hall, 1401 Marina Way South, Richmond CA 94804.

### City of Richmond Neighborhood Council Meetings

Richmond Neighborhood Council meetings are typically held monthly in a community center in each

neighborhood. For a particular neighborhood council meeting time and location, visit:

[www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentView.asp?DID=306](http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentView.asp?DID=306).

### San Pablo City Council Meetings

[www.ci.san-pablo.ca.us/main/citycouncil.htm](http://www.ci.san-pablo.ca.us/main/citycouncil.htm)

Meetings are held on the first and third Mondays of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers located at 13831 San Pablo Avenue.

### The Marin Institute

24 Belvedere Street

San Rafael, CA 94901

415.456.5692

[info@marininstitute.org](mailto:info@marininstitute.org)

[www.marininstitute.org](http://www.marininstitute.org)

The Marin Institute works to protect the public from the impact of the alcohol industry's negative practices. The Institute serves as a resource for solutions to community alcohol problems by helping develop environmental prevention strategies, alcohol policy, and media advocacy. Access to fact sheets, community success stories, and other tools for success are also available through their website.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Accessing Liquor Store Data

Information on the locations of businesses with licenses to sell alcohol comes from the California Department of Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC). To access a list of the current alcohol licenses in your city, go to the ABC website: [www.abc.ca.gov/datport/SubscrMenu.asp](http://www.abc.ca.gov/datport/SubscrMenu.asp). At this website, you may choose the type of information you would like to view by selecting from a list of reports available. For a list of the alcohol licenses in your city, select the “Query by City and License Type information” ad-hoc report near the bottom of the page. On the next page, you can select your city and the type of alcohol license you are interested in. For our research, we focused on “Active Off-Sale Retail Licenses,” or businesses that sell alcohol to be consumed off the business property. If you select Active Off-Sale Retail Licenses, the next page will provide a full list of the businesses in your city with this type of license, including the addresses and owner name. By clicking on the license number of a specific store, you may also view detailed information about that business, including past violations of relevant laws. The laws and penalties related to

alcohol businesses are available on the ABC webpage: [www.abc.ca.gov/LawsRulesReg.html](http://www.abc.ca.gov/LawsRulesReg.html).

The information on the density of liquor stores per 10,000 city residents was produced using the alcohol license data from ABC along with Census data on the number of residents per city. To obtain Census data on the total population per city and town in your county, follow the steps described in the Demographics Research Methods section on page 105. To calculate the number of liquor stores per 10,000 residents, use the following formula: number of liquor stores in the city, divided by the city's total population, multiplied by 10,000.

For our research on the number of liquor stores near parks and schools per city, we used the computer mapping software ArcGIS. The ArcGIS buffer analysis tool was used to identify the parks and schools within 1,000 feet of liquor stores. For detailed methods for our analysis with ArcGIS, please contact the Pacific Institute: [info@pacinst.org](mailto:info@pacinst.org); 510.251.1600.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Story is adapted from a conversation on June 19, 2008, with Antonio Medrano, a retired community college and high school teacher. The original mapping exercise, designed by Medrano, was actually carried out with teachers at Helms Middle School to understand the surrounding environments their students were exposed to on their daily walk to and from school. Helms Middle School is located in the city of San Pablo.
- 2 Rabow, J., and R. Watts. (1983). Alcohol availability and alcohol-related problems in 213 California cities. *Alcoholism, Clinical and Experimental Research*. 7:47–58.
- 3 Scribner, R.A., D. MacKinnon, and J. Dwyer. (1994). Alcohol outlet density and motor vehicle crashes in Los Angeles County cities. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 55:447–453.
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- 5 Graham K. (2006). Isn't it time we found out more about what the heck happens around American liquor stores? *Addiction*. 101(5): 619–620.
- 6 Stewart, K. (n.d). How Alcohol Outlets Affect Neighborhood Violence. Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Retrieved June 18, 2008 from <http://resources.prev.org/documents/AlcoholViolenceGruenewald.pdf>.
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- 13 Romley, J., D. Cohen, J. Ringel, and R. Sturm. (2007). Alcohol and Environmental Justice: The density of liquor stores and bars in urban neighborhoods in the United States. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. (68) 1: 48–55.
- 14 LaVeist, T. and J. Wallace. (2000). Health risk and inequitable distribution of liquor stores in African American neighborhoods. *Social Science and Medicine*. 51(4): 613–617.
- 15 Mack, R. (1997). Bringing down the walls of pre-emption: California cities fight for local control of alcohol outlets. *African American Law and Policy Report* 3(1): 195–324.
- 16 Maxwell, A., and D. Immergluck. (1997). Liquorlining: liquor store concentration and community development in lower-income Cook County (IL) neighborhoods. Chicago, IL: Woodstock Institute.
- 17 Alcohol outlets include liquor stores and other retail outlets that sell liquor for consumption off the premises. This figure excludes full-service grocery stores that sell alcohol.
- 18 Figure 1 only includes Contra Costa County cities; it does not include unincorporated areas or census designated places (CDP) of the county.
- 19 On average, a person will walk 1,000 feet in less than five minutes. This distance was chosen as an estimate of the short distance that students at a school, users of a park, and customers of liquor stores would easily travel.
- 20 San Pablo, California, Municipal Code 17.30.020: Alcohol Beverage Sales (2008).
- 21 Richmond, California, Municipal Code 15.04910: Ban on New Alcoholic Beverage Off-Sale Retail Establishments Near Schools or Near Other Alcoholic Beverage Off-Sale Retail Establishments (2008).
- 22 The Marin Institute. An EPIC Tale: Youth Prevent Alcohol Problems Through Environmental Design. Retrieved July 7, 2008 from [http://www.marininstitute.org/take\\_action/epic.htm](http://www.marininstitute.org/take_action/epic.htm).
- 23 Alameda County Public Health Department. (2008). Life and Death from Unnatural Causes: Health and Social Inequity in Alameda County. Oakland, CA: Alameda County Public Health Department.
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