

THE IMPORTANCE OF OPERATOR / BARTENDER LICENSES

Is Your Licensed Establishment Properly Staffed?

If you own or operate a business that serves or sells alcohol, it's important to understand Wisconsin's operator (bartender) license requirements. **A common misconception is that only one employee needs an operator's license.** And while that may technically meet the requirement in some situations, relying on a single licensed operator can quickly create compliance issues.

Wisconsin law requires that whenever alcohol is being sold or served, a licensed operator (bartender), the license holder, the appointed agent, or another authorized individual must be on the premises. If your only licensed operator leaves for a break, goes home sick, or ends a shift before another licensed person arrives, your establishment may be operating in violation of state law.

Employees who do not hold an operator's license may serve alcohol **only** when they are under the immediate supervision of a licensed operator. Immediate supervision means the licensed individual must be present in the same area, able to observe, communicate with, and supervise the employee. **If the licensed operator is not present, unlicensed employees may not continue serving alcohol.**

For organizations operating under a Temporary Class "B" beer or Temporary "Class B" wine (picnic) license, the requirement is even more straightforward: a licensed operator (or someone legally deemed to have operator privileges) must be on the premises at all times alcohol is being served. The best practice is to have multiple employees obtain operator's licenses. This provides flexibility for scheduling, breaks, shift changes, vacations, and unexpected absences while helping ensure your business remains in compliance throughout operating hours.

Remember, operator's licenses are issued by your local municipality and are valid only within that municipality. **First-time applicants must generally complete an approved Responsible Beverage Server Training Course before a license can be issued.**

Taking the time to ensure you have enough licensed operators on staff can help protect your business, your alcohol license, and your customers.