

Between the Lines

STIMULANTS AND ALCOHOL:

A DANGEROUS COMBINATION

By Ken Stecker*

Mark Your Calendars

NDAAs Capital Conference

February 7—9, 2010
Washington, DC

LIFESAVERS 2011

Phoenix Convention Center
March 27—29, 2011
Phoenix, AZ

NDAAs Summer Conference

July 17—20, 2011
Sun Valley, ID

NAPC Summer Conference

July 13—15, 2010
Sun Valley, ID

IACP DRE Section's 17th Annual Training Conference on Drugs, Alcohol and Impaired Driving

July 19—21, 2011
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In October 2010, nine students from Central Washington University in Ellensburg, WA were taken to the hospital after they became sick from drinking the high-alcohol energy drink "Four Loko." Authorities first suspected drug use because of the number of persons who had become ill at the same party. That drink, which is comparable to consuming five to six cans of beer, is referred to as "black-out in a can" or "liquid cocaine."

Alcoholic Energy Drinks (AEDs) are prepackaged beverages that combine alcohol with caffeine, taurine, guarana, ginseng, and other ingredients commonly associated with nonalcoholic energy drinks. They may either be malt or distilled spirits-based. Malt-based Spark, Bud Extra, Tilt, and Rock Star 21 are among the popular AED brands. Pink Vodka and V2 Vodka are examples of distilled spirit-based AEDs. Malt-based AEDs have a higher alcohol content (5 – 12%) as compared to the alcohol content of most beers (4 – 5%).

There are also what are known as Flavored Alcoholic Beverages (FABs). FABs are alcoholic beverages designed and marketed for entry-level drinkers. Examples of FABs being marketed with distilled spirits brand names include Smirnoff Ice, Skyy Blue, Bacardi Breezer, and Jack Daniels County Cocktails. The vast majority of entry level drinkers are under the legal drinking age of 21. The alcohol taste in FABs is concealed by sweet, fruity flavors that serve as an alternative to nonalcoholic beverages such as soft drinks or harsher tasting traditional alcohol products. FABs are also called "alcopops" because of their similarity to soda pop in flavor and sweetness.¹

FABs are popular with junior and senior high school students. In a 2007 survey, 12.2% of 8th graders, 21.8% of 10th graders, and 9.1% of 12th graders reported consuming "alcopops" within the last 30 days. Girls are much more likely to consume FAB than boys.²

Teenagers often refer to FABs as "girlie beer" or "cheerleader beer" because of their popularity with young, adolescent girls. Eighty-two percent of teen girls who have tried "alcopops" agree that they taste better than beer or alcoholic drinks.³

The younger the drinker, the more likely he/she will consume "alcopops." Among 8th grade drinkers, 78% reported FAB consumption in the last 30 days compared to 59% of 19-20 year olds and 36% of 25-30 year olds.⁴

The caffeine in the drink, often as much as five cups of coffee, suspends the effects of alcohol, allowing people to continue drinking long after they normally would have stopped consuming non-caffeinated alcohol health experts have said.⁵

Caffeine, a stimulant, masks the intoxicating effects of alcohol, which may lead to increased risk-taking.⁶ As a result, consumers may misjudge their level of intoxication and engage in risky behavior.⁷ Stimulants also encourage greater consumption by counteracting the depressant effects of the alcohol, increasing the risk of heavy binge drinking.⁸

Both the "Marin Institute" and Wake Forest University are the leaders in the research on this issue. The Wake Forest University report can be found at <http://www.wfubmc.edu/>. The Marin Institute's

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report can be found at <http://www.marininstitute.org/alcopops/resources/EnergyDrinkReport.pdf>.

To address this serious concern, the Michigan Coalition to Reduce Underage Drinking (MCRUD) has been collecting the research on the harmful effects of these drinks and what other states have been doing about it. Because of their efforts, on November 4, 2010, Michigan's Liquor Control Commission announced a statewide ban on stimulant-laced alcoholic energy drinks.

The decision was made in light of the several studies regarding alcohol energy drinks, the widespread community concerns aired by substance abuse prevention groups, parent groups and various members of the public, as well as The Food and Drug Administration's decision to further investigate these products.

The ban covers a number of products from four manufacturers currently approved for sale in the state. Manufacturers had until December 2, 2010 to remove these products from the market. A complete list of the products banned in Michigan may be found at the following website:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dleg/11_AED_Product_Release_12-2-2010_339777_7.pdf

Chairperson Nida Samona said that "Alcohol has been recognized as the number one drug problem among youth, and the popularity of alcohol energy drinks is increasing at an alarming rate among college students and underage drinkers." Further, according to Commissioner Patrick Gagliardi, who voted in favor of the ban, "One can, one serving, is enough to get you intoxicated. Alcohol energy drinks cost on average \$2-\$5 per can making these products easily accessible and affordable."

Following Michigan's lead, on November 17, 2010 the Food and Drug Administration notified four manufacturers of caffeinated alcoholic drinks, giving them 15 days to stop adding caffeine to the products or stop selling them altogether. Dr. Margaret Hamburg, the F.D.A. commissioner, said the drinks appeared to pose a serious public health threat because the caffeine masked the effects of the alcohol, leading to "a state of wide-awake drunk." After a yearlong review found no conclusive evidence that the drinks were safe, she said, the F.D.A. decided the caffeine in them was an illegal additive.

Getting behind the wheel after drinking alcohol, potentially endangering other innocent drivers on the highways, is bad enough. If a drinker decides to drive after drinking alcoholic energy drinks, the caffeine will most likely make this driver feel wide awake which causes them to underestimate their impaired condition.

The bottom line is that stimulant combined with alcohol is a dangerous combination at anytime, especially when driving!

1. See Mosher, J. and D. Johnson, "Flavored alcoholic beverages: An international marketing campaign that targets youth" *Journal of Public Health Policy* 26(3): 326-342 (2005).
2. *Id.*
3. American Medical Association, *Teenage Drinking Survey Results*. Available at: http://www.alcoholpolicysolutions.net/alcoholpolicy/md/press_room/girlie_drinks_release.htm.
4. Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., Bauchman, J.G., & Schulenberg, J.E. *Monitoring the Future national Results on Adolescent Drug Use: Overview of key findings, 2007* (NIH Publication No. 06-5882). Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse (2008).
5. Michigan's Liquor Control Commission announces ban on alcoholic energy drinks, "Michigan Live," November 4, 2010.
6. <http://www.marininstitute.org/alcopops/resources/EnergyDrinkReport.pdf>.
7. James F. Mosher, JD, The CDM Group, Inc., jimmosher@cdmgroup.com, based on the report: Simon, S. and Mosher, J. *Alcohol, Energy drinks and Youth: A Dangerous Mix*. San Rafael, CA; Marin Institute, 2007.
8. *Id.*

Congratulations and Thanks

Two of our state Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors are moving on. Creg Datig, Director of the TSRP Program for California, and Daniel Medlock, TSRP for Oklahoma, are leaving their positions with the new year.

Creg will be rejoining the Riverside County, CA District Attorney's Office as part of the management team. Dan has accepted a position as an Assistant District Attorney for Muskogee County, OK doing general prosecution.

Our congratulations and thanks to both of them for their dedication and tireless efforts in providing training and support to prosecutors and law enforcement, not only in their states, but across the entire country.

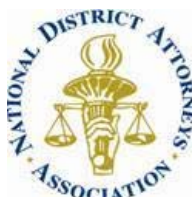
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The National Traffic Law Center is a program of the National District Attorneys Association. This document was prepared under Cooperative Agreement Number DTNH22-10-R-00360 from the U. S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Grant Number CD099913NDAAOP from the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Department of Transportation or the National District Attorneys Association.