

Safety of Alcoholic Energy Drinks to be Reviewed by FDA

Review of Caffeinated Alcohol Drinks is in Response to Health and Safety Concerns Raised by Attorneys General and Researchers

November 13, 2009; Philadelphia: Intoxicating "energy" drinks increasingly popular with youth will be reviewed for their safety according to an announcement issued today by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA action comes after an effort by the National Association of Attorneys General ("AGs") working with researchers to determine whether the caffeinated alcoholic beverages ("AEDs") are safe for consumption.

The research team included Amelia Arria, Ph.D. from the Treatment Research Institute (TRI), Mary Claire O'Brien, M.D. from the Wake Forest University School of Medicine, and others. In their written review, the researchers found "no general consensus among health professionals and the scientific research community that the use of caffeine in alcoholic beverages has been demonstrated to be safe." They cited evidence that consumers of AEDs also drink larger quantities of alcohol; that caffeine may mask the negative effects of alcohol intoxication, producing skewed self-impressions of impairment levels, and the drinks may produce the "wide awake and drunk" phenomenon that increases the likelihood of injury and/or violence to oneself and others.

With some estimates of AED consumption at 28% of college-age students, the three co-chairs of the AGs Youth Access to Alcohol Committee petitioned the FDA in writing to use its authority under the FDCA (Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act) to cause "the immediate removal of AEDs from the marketplace." Because the law places the burden of proof on the drinks' manufacturers, today's action gives them 30 days to empirically demonstrate the safety of the caffeine additive. Failure to do so could cause the FDA to ban the additive in alcoholic beverages.

Dr. Arria is Senior Scientist at TRI and a faculty member at the University of Maryland College Park, where she is Principal Investigator of the College Life Study, a NIDA-funded longitudinal study of college students. Dr. O'Brien is Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

Other authors of the researchers' report were Bruce Goldberger, Ph.D., Professor and Director of Toxicology at the University of Florida College of Medicine; Roland Griffiths, Ph.D., Professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine; and Kathleen Miller, Ph.D., Research Scientist at the State University of New York at Buffalo.
