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Stop “Drink Responsibly” Charade Says Alcohol Justice

Watchdog Calls for AG Investigation of Self-Promoting Brand Messages

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 2, 2012) – Alcohol Justice, the U.S. based alcohol industry watchdog, released an in-depth report today debunking Big Alcohol’s cynical “Drink Responsibly” messages. *“Alcohol producers and marketers are more interested in their public relations than public health,”* said Sarah Mart, MPH, director of research at Alcohol Justice and co-author of the new report, ***How Big Alcohol Abuses “Drink Responsibly” to Market Its Products.*** *“So it’s not surprising that they hide behind a vague, ineffective slogan that does nothing to reduce the annual catastrophe of harm caused by their products.”*

The new report outlines many dangers to “drink responsibly” messages, and emphasizes that the evidence is that “drink responsibly” messages are not shown to be effective policies to reduce alcohol-related harm. Yet alcohol corporations continue to tout their voluntary messages as a useful public health measure. The Big Alcohol global corporations even brand their useless messages, as in the “Enjoy Heineken Responsibly” message or “The perfect way to enjoy Patron is responsibly.”

Alcohol Justice reviewed “drink responsibly” messages in print ads in the September/October 2011 issues of forty-one different magazines that enjoy a high proportion of youth readership. They analyzed frequency, location, size, and content of beer, spirits and alcopops brand ads found in those publications, and compared the size of “drink responsibly” messages, if present, in the ads. 94% of the ads contained “drink responsibly” messages.

“We found numerous problems with the “drink responsibly” messages in our review,” stated Mart. *“Messages blended into backgrounds so that they virtually disappeared, or were tiny in relation to the size of the entire ads. But the most obvious problem was that companies use the message to promote brands, loyalty, and drinking.”*

Effective, evidence-based measures exist to reduce alcohol-related harm and reduce consumption – such as raising alcohol taxes and fees, restricting alcohol advertising, and supporting state control and regulation of alcohol sales. The self-serving industry perpetuates the charade of “drink responsibly” to increase sales, not to reduce inebriation.

“Big Alcohol should stop disguising its alcohol promotion as a public service, and government should stop accepting the ‘drink responsibly’ charade at face value,” stated Bruce Lee Livingston, Executive Director/CEO of Alcohol Justice. *“We are asking today for State Attorney Generals to investigate the alcohol industry’s ‘drink responsibly’ messages as misleading and deceptive advertising.”*

To read the complete study and list of recommendations, go to www.AlcoholJustice.org

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