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Regulators Play Whack-A-Mole with Flavored Malt Beverages

Alcohol Justice Report on How Alcopops Morphed from Caffeinated to Supersized

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (September 7, 2011) -- Alcohol Justice, formerly Marin Institute, released a revealing study today entitled: ***From Alcoholic Energy Drinks to Supersized Alcopops: A Rare Victory in Protecting Youth from Big Alcohol***. The report celebrates the concerted efforts of numerous public health organizations, states attorneys general, researchers, and government agencies that forced alcoholic energy drinks (AEDs) to remove caffeine from their products in November 2010.

More than a historical case study, it documents a growing tragedy as new or revised flavored malt beverages (FMBs, popularly called alcopops) immediately popped up like moles in a whack-a-mole game. The new lethal threats to underage youth are supersized alcopops with 4 to 5 standard drink sizes in a can. As Big Alcohol (from Pabst to MillerCoors, LLC and Anheuser-Busch InBev) continuously dreams up dangerous new products to hook youth, a moment's pause to celebrate the significant public health victory over AEDs may be in order – *with reservations*.

The report chronicles the rise and fall of AEDs, starting with Sparks and Tilt, and moving to Joose and Four Loko. *"In 2007 many states attorneys general leaned on Big Alcohol and we released a major evidence-based report about the problem,"* stated Sarah Mart, Research Director at Alcohol Justice. *"However, it took three years of youth hospitalizations and tragic deaths from AEDs to finally get the products off the market."*

Federal regulators, led by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), acted on AEDs by sending a strongly worded ruling that the addition of caffeine to alcoholic beverages was an "unsafe food additive," not approved for use, and continued violation could result in seizure of illegal products.

In response, most producers reformulated their alcopops without the illegal stimulants, but at the same time new dangerous products were released. The new industry standard is supersized alcopops: sweet, bubbly FMBs in 24-ounce single-serving containers with up to 12% alcohol content, enough to get any person inebriated and poison a teen.

"Unfortunately our case study couldn't end with just celebrating FDA action," said Mart. *"We had to look at how smaller companies like Phusion and Pabst led the whole product line to supersized containers and alcohol content."*

"Big Alcohol replaced AEDs with an arguably more dangerous product: the same companies grew their AEDs into "supersized alcopops," stated Bruce Lee Livingston, Executive Director / CEO of Alcohol Justice. *"Blast by Pabst Brewing Company, and Mike's Harder Lemonade bullied their way onto the shelves with alcopops on steroids, joining bulked-up former AEDs like Tilt, Four Loko and Sparks. Alcohol Justice recommends the Federal Trade Commission, TTB and Congress investigate how supersized alcopops are threatening our youth,"* Livingston added, *"and states can ban them, limit their availability or tax the heck out of them."*

To read ***From Alcoholic Energy Drinks to Supersized Alcopops: A Rare Victory in Protecting Youth from Big Alcohol***, go to www.AlcoholJustice.org. The report was authored by Michele Simon, JD, MPH, Sarah Mart, MPH, and Ryan Treffers, JD.

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