

## **Dutch Minister doesn't follow advise on labeling alcoholic energy drinks**

Utrecht, October 8th 2009

### **Alcoholic energy drinks: the risks**

Alcoholic energy drinks are very popular among young people in the Netherlands as well as in the rest of Europe, and pre-mixed drinks are widely available. An alcoholic energy drink contains, besides alcohol, caffeine, taurine, ginseng, glucuronolactone, B-vitamins, guarana or herbals with a similar stimulating effect. Producers claim these products increase physical endurance, concentration, awareness and reaction rate (Simon & Mosher, 2007). Research from the US revealed that adolescents who drink alcoholic energy drinks, drink more often risky quantities (binge-drinking). Because alcohol is sedative and energy drinks are stimulating, the effects of alcohol are masked which may lead to excessive alcohol consumption (O'Brien, et al, 2008). Also other problematic (alcohol-related) consequences occur more often; use of marihuana, taking sexual risks, fighting, riding with an intoxicated driver, being physically hurt or injured, and the need for medical help (O'Brien, et al, 2008; Ferreira, et al, 2006).

### **Background for risk inventory**

On the 31th of July 2008, STAP, the Dutch institute for alcohol policy, made a call on the supermarkets to ban alcoholic energy drinks from their stock, because of the increased alcohol-related harm risks. As a reaction on this call, questions were raised to minister Klink ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, about the risk of alcoholic energy drinks on the 4<sup>th</sup> of august 2008. The minister ordered an independent risk inventory of alcoholic energy drinks, executed by the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA). The aim of this literature study was to assess where ether the combination of alcohol use and energy drinks, increases the harmful risks of drinking alcohol<sup>1</sup>.

### **Report on risk inventory of alcoholic energy drinks**

The report of the risk inventory was released on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 and concluded that:

- Drinking an alcoholic energy drink can be assumed to have the same effect as drinking alcohol and energy drink (or caffeine) in the same quantity as a pre-mix;
- There are indications that drinking energy drinks leads to more problem behavior and mixing energy drinks with alcohol leads increased alcohol consumption and more alcohol-related harm;
- The consumption of energy drinks or caffeinated drinks together with alcohol leads to underestimation of the effects of alcohol, but not to decreased alcohol concentrations in blood or breath. Along with moderate alcohol consumption energy drinks can compensate the effects of alcohol on the ability to react;
- It is assumed that one can of 250 ml energy drink doesn't cause any additional effects when taken together with a limited amount of alcohol.

### **Recommendations by the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority**

The three recommendations of the report followed by this inventory are:

- Asses the safety of (alcoholic) energy drinks and seek for an EU approach. The additional use of a number of ingredients to this drinks is unclear and the effects of consumption of more than one portion (can or bottle) on one's health are merely unknown;
- An inventory should be made, of the sincere harmful effects of drinking alcohol in combination with energy drinks;
- Enact detailed regulations for labeling alcoholic energy drinks as well as energy drinks. One can think of clear warning labels on the product, like: 'not suitable for

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<sup>1</sup> See the call of STAP; <http://www.eucam.info/eucam/home/news.html/1881/236/alcohol-and-energy-drinks-a-risky-mix#p1881>

children, heart patients, persons sensitive for caffeine' and state that taking in more than one drink or in combination with alcohol, risks for undesirable side-effects increase. The Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority recommends that until this all is realized, one can ask producers to cooperate voluntarily.

### **Reaction of the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport on the report**

Unfortunately, the minister doesn't attend to take action on this matter. In a letter, he states: "There is no indication that drinking alcoholic energy drinks is an extensive problem, at this moment. The results of this risk inventory and of the research on the effects of labeling alcoholic drinks give no motive to me to introduce warning labels on alcoholic energy drinks or to take other actions."

### **EUCAM remarks:**

In agreement with the conclusions and recommendations of the risk inventory of the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority, EUCAM underlines the importance of further research on the harmful effects of alcoholic energy drinks. Furthermore, clear and effective labeling of alcoholic energy products can be seen as a minimal necessary intervention to inform consumers on the potential risks of the product, but restrictions of the availability of alcoholic energy drinks need to be considered.

### **References:**

- Ferreira, S.E., de Mello, M. T., Pompéia, S. & Souza-Formigoni, M.L. (2006). Effects of energy drink ingestion on alcohol intoxication. *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, 30, 598-605.
- O'Brien, M.C., McCoy, T.P., Rhodes, S.D., Wagoner, A. & Wolfson, M. (2008). Caffeinated cocktails: energy drink consumption, high-risk drinking and alcohol-related consequences among college students. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 15, 453-460.
- Simon, M. & Mosher, J. (2007). *Alcohol, energy drinks, and youth: a dangerous mixture*. Marin Institute: California.

### **More information on alcoholic energy drinks?**

**EUCAM report:** Drinks with a boost: Alcoholic Energy Drinks<sup>2</sup>

**EUCAM news:** The raise of alcoholic energy drinks in Europe<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.eucam.info/content/bestanden/alcohol-with-a-boost\\_final.pdf](http://www.eucam.info/content/bestanden/alcohol-with-a-boost_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.eucam.info/content/bestanden/the\\_raise\\_of\\_alcoholic\\_energy\\_drinks\\_in\\_europe6.pdf](http://www.eucam.info/content/bestanden/the_raise_of_alcoholic_energy_drinks_in_europe6.pdf)