March, 2010 Topics

Added Caffeine in Alcohol Beverages is Not Generally Recognized as Safe!

Resources added to the Resource Database

Added Caffeine in Alcoholic Beverages is Not Generally Recognized as Safe!

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The Food and Drug Administration, FDA, has approved the use of added caffeine in non-alcoholic-cola type beverages. The FDA has classified this form of added caffeine as GRAS or “Generally Recognized As Safe” if the added caffeine is no greater than 0.02%. The FDA has not approved caffeine for use at any level in alcoholic beverages, and consequently mandated in November of 2009 that 30 manufacturers of caffeinated alcoholic beverages produce their rationale and supporting data concluding that their products are GRAS.

Under the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act a food additive is presumed “unsafe” unless its particular use has been approved by federal regulation or is generally recognized as safe under the conditions of its intended use. A product is not considered GRAS until there is consensus about the safety of the substance as it is intended to be used among qualified experts based scientific data.

Caffeinated alcoholic beverages include brands such as Torque, Hard Wired, Smirnoff Raw Tea Malt Beverage, 3AM Vodka, and P.I.N.K. Vodka, Tequila, Rum, Gin, White Whiskey, and Sake. All of these alcoholic beverages contain added caffeine or similar stimulants, such as guarana. Some of these new products, “Max Vibe,” for example, contain 12% alcohol by volume and are available in cans up to 23.5oz. In response to the FDA’s position on caffeinated alcoholic beverages Anheuser-Busch and Miller have already agreed to stop manufacturing and distributing their caffeinated alcoholic beverages.

These products are being marketed to young adults and the research that has been conducted on the safety and consequences of consuming caffeinated alcoholic beverages has been done in populations of college students. Publications have reported up to 28% of U.S. college students say they use products that combine caffeine and alcohol. College students who drink caffeinated energy drinks drink more alcohol than their peers. Other consequences include a decreased ability to judge one’s level of intoxication, which in turn increases the risk of drunken driving, alcohol poisoning, taking advantage of someone sexually, and being taken advantage of sexually. The studies that have investigated the safe level of co-ingestion of caffeine and alcohol have all set the safe value at 0.08 BAC (blood alcohol concentration), the legal limit in many states.

Implications for Extension Educators

When leading label-reading exercises or lessons on healthy beverages, you may encounter questions or signs of confusion related to products containing both caffeine and alcohol. Providing information on this topic is not within the scope of WNEP, but it could be very helpful to point out that caffeinated energy drinks with alcohol are a topic of concern among some health experts and recommend that learners ask their health care providers for advice. For more information on caffeinated alcoholic beverages go to http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodIngredientsPackaging/ucm190366.htm
Resources Added to the Resource Database


NOAHnet lessons – four adapted to be learner centered, https://www.uwex.edu/ces/fip/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=5706