

Alcopops

Alcopops are sweet, fruity, often bubbly alcoholic beverages designed for and marketed to youth (ages 12-24). From hard lemonade to alcoholic energy drinks that look just like their non-alcoholic counterparts, new alcopops are entering the market with a disturbing frequency. The industry loves alcopops, or Flavored Malt Beverages (FMBs) as they call them, for several reasons:

Targeting Girls: Alcopops have roughly the same amount of alcohol as beer, but their high sugar and—in some cases—caffeine content does a great job of masking the flavor and the affect. And that’s where young women come in. In recent years, teen girls report drinking alcohol in greater quantities and frequencies than their male peers and the American Medical Association (AMA) points to the popularity of Alcopops or ‘girlie drinks’ as a significant factor behind the shift.



Taxes: Alcopops – which the industry claims are made from brewed malt, are categorized in most states as “beer” and that means that their producers avoid the significantly higher tax rates for spirits or “hard alcohol.” Low taxes also help keep the price point low and the youth appeal high.

Availability: Their status as “beer” makes alcopops much easier to buy than hard alcohol. In a number of states, that means they’re available wherever beer is available, such as convenience stores, gas stations and mini-marts.

Alcoholic Energy Drinks

Public health and safety officials have become alarmed by the newest entry into the world of alcoholic beverages.

“This new line of alcoholic beverage product is extremely similar in look and feel to the popular energy drinks that contain no alcohol. Our youth are at risk when clerks and retailers cannot differentiate between nonalcoholic and alcoholic beverages being sold.”

Chris Lilly, Kentucky Alcoholic Beverage Control

Alcoholic energy drinks are prepackaged beverages that contain not only alcohol but also caffeine and other stimulants. Earlier this year, 29 State Attorney Generals signed a letter to Anheuser-Busch expressing their concern about Spykes, an alcoholic energy drink packaged in colorful 2-ounce bottles with obvious appeal to youth. The objections of law enforcement officials as well as parents and leading public health organizations caused Anheuser-Busch to pull Spykes from the market. But the story does not end there. Many other alcoholic energy drinks are still on the market. Brands that our staff found readily available include Sparks, Torque, and Tilt.

Despite a sharp increase in sales of alcoholic energy drinks, their appeal to underage drinkers, and health concerns involved in mixing stimulants with alcohol, research on the potential dangers of these products remains limited. Both scientists and policy-makers should focus increased attention on this emerging product category.



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