

National Liquor News June 2011

Cancer Council Australia takes 'safe' definition to new extremes

The Cancer Council of Australia gained a lot of publicity for itself when it announced that no level of drinking was safe. Not one drop of alcohol should be approved for consumption because it was not 'safe' – there was always some risk of cancer as a result of a single drop of alcohol.

Normally, health NGOs beat up the impact of their diseases at least a little. Diseases are complex, and the complexities need to be simplified for journalists and their readers or viewers. And to be honest, most Australians do not pay much attention to news stories about something not getting any worse. 'No crisis here' is not a headline you will see.

But the Cancer Council has redefined 'safe' to mean the complete absence of risk. Not a little risk as in safe enough, not a risk level that is almost undetectable. Only the complete absence of risk is now considered 'safe' by the Cancer Council.

Applying the Cancer Council's new definition of 'safe' to other common activities reveals how misguided their new approach to 'safe' is. Motor cars are unsafe as soon as they are in motion, even at one kilometre per hour – there is always some small risk of collision. Every form of exercise – walking, running, swimming, cycling – would be regarded as not 'safe' as there are the risks of sprained ankles, damaged ligaments or being knocked over by a car.

Don't even think about doing any DIY at home. Power tools or step ladders are inherently not 'safe'.

People appreciate being told about realistic risks, but the great majority of us also know that most decisions in life require a balancing of risk and reward. Nothing is risk-free and judgements have to be made.

However, I predict that the Cancer Council will continue its campaign that all alcohol consumption is risky. No doubt they will be sponsored by governments. Look forward to the new theme of government-sponsored alcohol health messages – "every drink is doing you harm".