

National Liquor News - March 2011

Premixed Energy Drinks

The federal government and several states are becoming increasingly active about pre-mixed alcohol energy drinks. Their fear is that young people are using the energy ingredients to offset the alcohol, so becoming 'wide awake drunks' as the anti alcohol activists have labelled them.

To these governments' minds, the extra energy allows the stereotypical young drinker to drink for longer and harder, and avoid becoming sleepy and winding down. The evidence for these concerns is still emerging and not yet settled.

On premise, alcohol and energy drinks – both pre-mixed and mixed – are coming under pressure by Licensing Commissioners and the Police.

DSICA has a very good policy on energy drinks. Members don't and won't use Taurine as an ingredient. The caffeine level will be less than the run-of-the-mill cola soft drinks sold in supermarkets. No claims will be made about the energy ingredients so the marketing won't be focused on the energy benefits.

Contrast that last policy with the marketing of the non-alcohol energy drinks. They have themes and slogans that alcohol marketing just would not get away with (correctly so).

The problem faced by the regulators in cracking down on alcohol and energy drinks is similar to that faced by the Australian Government with its RTD crackdown and tax hike – easy substitution. Energy drinks are widely available at every service station, supermarket and 7-11. Drinkers can buy them at any hour, and simply consume heavily before entering licensed premises. If drinking at home or in parks, the nearest supermarket will do.

Then there are the caffeine pills which are about the size of an ecstasy pill and as easy to smuggle into bars. They are also for sale in 7-11s and service stations.

I fear the alcohol industry will be further regulated – without evidence of its effectiveness - simply because the legal structure of licensing makes it easily do so, while the energy products sold outside of our industry will simply continue as before. Just with higher sales.