



Drink-spiking a Shocking Consequence of RTD Tax Grab

An increased risk of drink-spiking is a shocking, unintended consequence of the Federal Government's RTD tax hike, according to the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia (DSICA).

Mr Stephen Riden, Information & Research Manager for DSICA noted the concern of highly respected medical practitioners that a switch from purchasing pre-mixed drinks in a can or bottle to opting for open beverages (at a bar or party) was putting women at increased risk of drink spiking.

As reported today in the *Sunday Telegraph*, St Vincent's Hospital emergency department director Professor Gordian Fulde claims: "Drink-spiking virtually always occurs in glasses."

Mr Riden said the Government's move to increase the cost of Ready-to-Drink (RTD) beverages only was in conflict with public education campaigns aimed at minimising the risk of drink-spiking.

The Federal Government's own National Drug Strategy states that: "... *the public be encouraged to drink bottled or canned beverages at licensed premises to make drink-spiking more difficult.*"

And it was the young people themselves who were also ringing alarm bells over the increased dangers they now faced as a direct result of the Government adding a 70% tax hike on the safer closed Ready-to-Drink (RTD) beverages.

"Young women have been warned against open drinks – either being bought for them or having them poured for them at bars and parties. This is because there is the heightened risk of having something illicit and dangerous put into their drink without their approval or awareness."

Mr Riden said the police and health educators had worked hard to ensure young people were kept safe from drink-spiking through awareness programs.

"All that hard work is now being put at risk," he said. "It is not just the risk of drugs being slipped into an open drink. It is the risk of more alcohol too. But consumers really have no choice but to opt for the more potent and potentially dangerous open drinks.

"The Government continues to claim the 70% RTD tax hike is a health measure. There is nothing healthy about encouraging drinking practices that increase the risk of drink-spiking.

“The liquor industry, hoteliers and police need to be vigilant to ensure drink-spiking does not escalate as drinkers switch from RTDs to beverages mixed or poured by other people.”

Riden believes the increased risk of drink-spiking is just one of the social consequences of the 70 per cent tax increase to RTDs announced on 27 April.

“There are reports of drinkers switching from RTDs to cheaper, more potent alcohol products that increase the likelihood of binge-drinking,” he said.

“Many people who can no longer afford a four-pack of RTDs at \$20 are simply buying full strength spirits and bottles of mixers to maximise the bang for their buck.

“The problem is that self-mixing drinks makes it near impossible to know how much alcohol is being served and consumed. While people pour what they think is an average drink they are, in fact, mixing a much stronger one.

“We now face a dangerous situation where there is no means to control the amount or type of alcohol being mixed.”

Mr Riden also said that young people had signaled a return to drinking cheap cask-wine, known as ‘goon’. “This is not surprising given that cask wine is essentially subsidised by the excise paid by other alcoholic products,” he said.

“It is a real concern that as little as \$10 gets you four litres of wine with an alcohol content of 12 per cent. This is 36 standard drinks – making cask wine the drink of choice for young people looking for maximum alcohol content at the lowest possible price.

“Anyone who has heard the term ‘goon’ knows we are not talking about quality wine being sipped over dinner. Nothing about cheap cask wine in the hands of young people is conducive to responsible consumption of alcohol.

“We all agree that Australians want to see a comprehensive solution to binge-drinking and substance abuse in our community.

“We look forward to working with the Government to help bring about a proper, genuine and lasting solution to problem drinking in our communities.”

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