News

Getting a real shot of energy in a can

BY MATT ROCHELEAU FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE Tuesday, August 5, 2008 2:42 AM EDT

Rockstar, Amp, Sparks and Four Maxed caffeinated energy drinks are packaged similarly; however, the drinks on the right contains more alcohol than a beer, while the others have none. Some claim that teens may be the intended target audience for both drinks. (Staff photo by Drew Pillsbury)

Partiers looking for a more electrified buzz concocted increasingly popular "Jägerbombs" and "Vodka Red Bulls" by adding the energy drink that - so the marketing goes - "vitalizes the body and mind."

Now, instead of having to combine a shot of Jägermeister or vodka with the 80 milligrams of caffeine, taurine and other energizing ingredients found in a can of Red Bull, similar caffeinated alcoholic drinks are coming pre-mixed.

But with their bold packaging and flavors that include apple, watermelon and tropical fruit, the beverages are considered most likely to appeal to the youth market.

Watchdogs say the beverage distributors may even have teens in their sights.

"These drinks are clearly marketed towards kids," D.A.R.E. Northeastern Regional Director Ron Brogan said. "Alcoholic energy drinks are a concern," echoed Stephen Wallace, chairman and chief executive officer of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) National in Marlboro.

Top Headlines

Getting a real shot of energy in a can

In North, a facelift for an old museum

In Foxboro, a cancer fundraiser goes on despite heavy rain

Attleboro prosecutor charged with sexual assault

Gas prices dip, but drivers' anger remains

Print this story
Email this story
Photo Reprints
RSS
Forums
AddThis

Caffeine content in most of the malt beverages is less than a 16-ounce cup of drip coffee, according to Boston Children's Hospital.

On the other hand, a typical cup of joe usually doesn't come with other stimulants like ginseng and taurine or pack a higher alcohol content than most cans of beer.

The alcohol by volume in a can of Budweiser or Heineken is 5 percent, Corona Extra's is 4.6 percent and Bud Light, Miller Lite and Coors Light each have an alcohol content of 4.2 percent.

But the alcohol-stimulant drink Four Maxed, made by Phusion Projects, is twice as potent as a can of Bud, with an alcohol content of 10 percent, and comes infused with taurine, guarana and wormwood oil.

Another juiced-up beverage - called Joose - has an alcohol content of 9 percent to 9.9 percent, while the malt beverages 3SUM and Rockstar 21 contain 6 percent and 6.9 percent of alcohol by volume.

Many of the drinks' labels do not list the exact amount of caffeine inside.

United Brands, makers of Joose and 3SUM, refused an interview or to disclose the amount of

caffeine in their flavored malt beverages.

Sparks, a 16-ounce "caffeinated alcohol beverage" made by Miller Brewing Co. containing taurine, ginseng and 6 percent to 7 percent alcohol by volume, also has 17 mg of caffeine per can, MillerCoors Senior Media Relations Manager Julian Green said.

Of particular concern to industry watchdogs are similarities in the appearances of alcoholic and non-alcoholic energy drinks. "They clearly shouldn't be in the same section," said David DeIuliis spokesman for the Massachusetts chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

"Not only product placement, but also packaging is a concern," said Wallace, the SADD executive who noted that product coloring, logos and design appear to be aimed at teens.

At City Spirits on Park Street in Attleboro, drinks like Sparks and Four Maxed are stored in a separate cooler away from non-alcoholic beverages.

A City Spirits employee, along with an employee at Patriot Liquors on Pleasant Street, said the average age of customers who purchase such drinks is 21 to 30.

Both stores said they have never confused a caffeinated alcoholic drink for a regular energy drink.

But the government is concerned.

Anheuser-Busch reformulated its Bud Extra and Tilt beverages to remove caffeine and guarana following a June 26 agreement with attorneys general in 11 states and will not produce any caffeinated alcoholic beverages in the future.

"The Attorney Generals drew their own conclusion about whom we were targeting in marketing Bud Extra and Tilt," Anheuser-Busch spokeswoman Francine Katz said. "Their allegations are wholly inconsistent with the way these products actually were marketed."

But not everyone agrees.

More than 500 energy drinks were introduced worldwide in 2006, according to an 18-page report by the Marin Institute in San Rafael, Calif., titled "Alcohol, Energy Drinks, and Youth: A Dangerous Mix".

That same year energy drink sales totaled more than $3.2 billion - a 516 percent inflation-adjusted increase from 2001, according to the report.

The report found about one-third of 12- to 24-year-olds regularly consume energy drinks, and concluded that age group would be more likely than others to try caffeinated alcoholic beverages.

Mixing alcohol and caffeine also may cause physical health problems, since alcohol slows down the central nervous system, while caffeine speeds up the nervous system and heart rate, the report said.

Furthermore, "caffeine masks the intoxicating effects of alcohol, which may lead to increased risk-taking," like a person feeling OK to drive when in fact they are drunk, the report said.

Return to Previous Page

Post Your Comments

*Member ID:

*Password:

Forgot Your Password?

Login

or

Sign Up!

© The Sun Chronicle, Attleboro-North Attleboro, MA.
All rights reserved. | Unauthorized reproduction is prohibited.