

MEDIA RELEASE

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St Patrick's Day warning: increased harm from alcoholic energy drinks

In a bid to curb alcohol-related harm, health experts are today urging revellers to avoid drinking alcoholic energy drinks, such as 'Jager Bombs' while celebrating St Patrick's Day this week.

A US study just published in the international journal *Addictive Behaviours* has found that energy drinks which mix alcohol and caffeine place consumers at a much greater risk of harms, including:

- sexual abuse,
- alcohol poisoning,
- drink-driving or riding with a drink-driver,
- physical injuries and
- requiring medical treatment.

"Energy drinks mask alcohol's sedative effects, so people who mix the two have a harder time judging how drunk they are and are more at risk of alcohol-related harm," said Geoff Munro, National Policy Manager Australian Drug Foundation.

The study showed that patrons who had consumed alcoholic drinks mixed with energy drinks were

- three times more likely to leave the bar highly drunk and
- four times more likely to drink-drive.

The Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand stated that "drinking alcohol with stimulants, such as caffeine and guarana, can result in wide-awake drunks who perceive that they are safe to drive...when in fact they are dangerously impaired."

"Some responsible venues in Victoria have already removed these risky drinks from their menus and we are encouraging other venues to take a similar initiative," said Mr Munro.

"Energy drinks carry warnings that they contain caffeine, so it's ironic that they don't warn against the potential harms to people who mix the products with alcohol, added Mr Munro.

Health experts are also calling on Government to insist that unmixed energy drinks carry health warnings that they should not be consumed with alcohol, much like those placed on cough mixture and other legal drugs.

The study titled '*Event-level analyses of energy drink consumption and alcohol intoxication in bar patrons*' is published in the April 2010 edition of *Addictive Behaviours* (v35, n4).

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Alcohol remains one of the major causes of preventable death and illness in Australia. As such, the Australian Drug Foundation, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and VicHealth advocate for evidence based policy to prevent and reduce the harms caused by alcohol to Australians.