“In the News”

ALCOHOL NEWS

Jack Daniel’s Hard Cola
On Monday, May 20, Brown Foreman Beverages Worldwide and Miller Brewing Company announced that their flavored-malt drink, Jack Daniel’s Hard Cola, would join the race among alternative alcoholic drinks this summer. The cola-flavored beverage, which comes on the heels of several new alternative malt drinks, or “malternatives,” will be available in U.S. stores by September. The drink has some Jack Daniel’s flavoring but is not spirits-based. It “has a cola base flavor in which you can taste Jack Daniel’s,” said Erin Schlader, director for the Jack Daniel’s brand. He said that some consumers described the drink as having a vanilla flavor to it, while others said it tasted a little bit like root beer. The drink has a 5 percent alcohol by volume.

Energy Drinks Being Used as Party Drinks
According to health reports in June 2001, drinks such as Red Bull, Adrenaline Rush, So-Be, and Jones Whoop-Ass are the fastest-growing segment of the beverage industry. Partiers mix these drinks (most contain stimulants such as caffeine, sugar, and guarana, a derivative of a South American plant) with alcohol, thinking they can get drunk without feeling some of the negative alcoholic effects. Health officials are concerned about the effects of mixing stimulants with a depressant like alcohol. Chris Rosenbloom, head of the nutrition department at Georgia State University, says, “What you’ll be is a wide-awake drunk. It is dangerous, this false notion that if I take this energy drink I’m alert and OK.” According to Dr. Michael Hirt, the medical director at the Center for Integrative Medicine at the Encino-Tarzana Regional Medical Center in California says that some energy drinks contain ephedrine. In combination with caffeine, ephedrine has been proven to cause sometimes fatal heart problems.

Preliminary Highway Death Statistics for 2001 Show Fight Against Drunk Driving Has Stalled
In April 2002, the National Commission Against Drunk Driving Chairman Robert Stempel issued a press release. He said, “Each year since 1994, alcohol-related traffic deaths have hovered between 16,000 and 17,000, while the percentage of highway deaths that have been alcohol-related has stagnated at about 40 percent.” An estimated 600,000 other people are injured each year in alcohol-related crashes. The momentum to stop drunk driving saw a dramatic 35 percent drop in deaths from 1982 until the stagnation started in 1994. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, at the current level of drunk driving in America, about three in every ten Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash in their lifetime.

Researchers Identify Alcohol-Related Genes
Researchers at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver have found 41 genes that may be factors in determining whether someone becomes an alcoholic. Dr. James Sizela explains, “We found 41 genes that were different, and some of those are likely part of the molecular pathways in the brain through which alcohol acts. This work provides insight into specific new molecular pathways and genes through which alcohol may work, and thus may be useful in prevention and treatment of alcohol abuse.”

Funding in part provided by the City of Manhattan
Survey Shows Many Emergencies Result from Drinking
In July 2001, Reuters reported that a British study found that one in four individuals in Great Britain who visited an emergency room drank alcohol around the time of the injury. Further research into the injuries found that 94 percent of the patients who had harmed themselves had alcohol in their blood. Alcohol was also present in one-half of patients who had been assaulted.

Olympian Shea Criticized For Underage-Drinking Remarks
Olympic gold medal skeleton racer Jimmy Shea clarified remarks he made in a speech to high-school students in West Hartford, Connecticut after officials became concerned about the message he gave students regarding underage drinking. During a talk at his alma mater, Shea told the students, “I’m not saying not to drink; I drank a lot in this school. What I’m saying is, don’t die. Don’t be crippled for the rest of your life, don’t lose your arm, don’t mangle your face.” In a clarified written statement, he said, “I want to make it clear that I do not condone or encourage underage drinking. However, I refuse to ignore the issue of teenage drinking in high school. My comments were open and honest, and were based on my own experiences as a high-school student.” In 1997, Shea performed 24 hours of community service and paid a $1,290 fine after pleading guilty to driving under the influence in Utah. A drunk driver killed Shea’s grandfather in January 2002.

Alcohol Prevalent in Children’s Films
In March 2002, the journal Pediatrics published a study conducted by Kimberly Thompson and Fumie Yokota of the Harvard School of Public Health. After an analysis of 81 G-rated films produced from 1937 to 2000, they found that 40 percent of the films showed alcohol use, while 37 percent of the movies depicted tobacco use. Researchers also found that alcohol and tobacco use in animated films is declining.

Binge Drinking Hinders Brain-Cell Growth
In November 2001, researchers at the Center for Alcohol Studies at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported that binge drinking damages the brain and interferes with the repair of brain cells. Using inebriated rats, they found that new cell growth in the brain’s key memory center dropped below half of normal following extended periods of intoxication. Dr. Kim Nixon, lead author of the study, says, “We found that the number of newly-formed cells was decreased by 57 percent when compared to the no-alcohol group.” After one month of alcohol exposure, “the number of newly-formed cells was decreased by 97 percent.” With similar structure and functions between rats and human brains, the study suggests, “high doses of alcohol negatively affect the formation of new brain cells.”

Brain Differences Seen in Children from Alcohol-Dependent Families
A recent study showed that children from families with several generations of alcohol dependence exhibit differences in their brain when compared to children without a family history of alcoholism. The study, published in the journal Biological Psychiatry, found that teenagers with a family history of alcohol dependence had a smaller amygdala, the right side of the brain that controls basic emotions. Dr. Shirley J. Hill of the University of Pittsburgh said, “When we looked at some of the children [from alcohol-dependent families] who hadn’t had any drugs or alcohol to speak of, [even then] the same pattern of the smaller right amygdala volume was seen.” She also mentioned that scientists aren’t sure why it is smaller but it could indicate a developmental delay. The amygdala is part of the “reward circuit” within the brain, which is associated with some addictive behaviors.

Female Drinkers Face More Health Risks than Men
Women who drink heavily face more severe, long-term health problems than men. Dr. Sharon Wilsnack of the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences explains the gender differences. She says, “There are gender differences in gastric metabolism. Women seem to have a little less of an enzyme that breaks down alcohol in the stomach. So even if women drink the same amount, they get a more concentrated dose in the blood stream and that has more effect on all of the organ system. Also women have proportionately less body water so the alcohol is less diluted.”

Alcohol More Strongly Linked to Violence than Other Drugs
Researchers at the Robert Presley Center for Crime and Justice Studies at the University of California conducted a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on illicit drugs, alcohol, and violence. They found that a quarter of violent assailants were under the influence of alcohol, compared to less than 10 percent who were under the influence of illegal drugs like heroin, cocaine, or PCP. Robert Nash Parker, lead investigator for the study and professor of sociology said, “If you want to have effective policies related to drugs, if you want to have fewer bad outcomes in terms of health, welfare, and violence, the drug you want to focus on is alcohol. The evidence is pretty powerful and pretty convincing if someone is willing to look at it.”
OTHER DRUG NEWS

Getting High on Embalming Fluid
According to law-enforcement officials, youth are buying marijuana or tobacco cigarettes soaked in embalming fluid. These types of cigarettes, called “dry,” “tacky,” or “wet,” can produce violent and psychotic side effects. Embalming fluid is a compound of formaldehyde, methanol, ethanol, and other solvents, and the type of high depends on what is contained in the embalming fluid.

Expert Says Ecstasy Trends Similar to Crack
Increasing Ecstasy use among the youth in the United States may be as destructive as the crack-cocaine epidemic during the 1980’s. Last summer, Dr. Alan Leshner, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, said, “In the short term, Ecstasy can cause dramatic changes in heart rate and blood pressure, dehydration, and a potentially life-threatening increase in body temperature. In the long term, research shows that Ecstasy can cause lasting changes in the brain’s chemical systems that control mood and memory.”

Dangerous New Drug (PMA) Being Mistaken for Ecstasy
Recently, the Medical Journal of Australia presented research to suggest that young people have been using the drug PMA (paramethoxyamphetamine) when they thought they had been using Ecstasy. PMA (street name “death”) is a recreational drug that produces toxic effects similar to Ecstasy but with more severe consequences, such as poisoning leading to a coma, generalized seizures, and losing complete control of the body’s heating and cooling system.

Study Links Youth Marijuana Use with Crime
The results of a recent study determined that marijuana-use rates among youth who have been arrested rose steadily from 25 percent in 1991 to 57 percent in 1996, and the rate stayed consistent near 60 percent through the late 1990’s.

Children More Likely to Use Marijuana if Parents Did
A study conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services found that parents who used marijuana multiple times and didn’t perceive the drug as risky were more likely to have children who feel the same way. The study reflects the influence that parents have on their children’s choices to stay healthy and drug-free.

Researchers Find No Benefit to Medical Marijuana
After evaluating 39 previous clinical studies, researchers determined no significant proof of the effectiveness of marijuana easing pain. Some scientists suggested that marijuana had no more effect in controlling pain and nausea than codeine. Current data shows negative effects from marijuana may surpass the benefits and limit any future extensive use.

Cocaine Craving Grows After Use Ends
New data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse suggests that even after users quit cocaine, cravings for the drug increase over time. Environmental reminders often stimulate cocaine cravings and accompany a relapse to using the drug. Researchers wrote, “The data from this study suggest that an individual is most vulnerable to relapse to cocaine use well beyond the acute drug-withdrawal phase.”

OxyContin® is Leading Killer of Illicit-Drug Users in Florida
A study performed by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement showed that 218 people died from OxyContin overdoses in the first six months of 2001, compared to 126 deaths from heroin and 183 from cocaine toxicity. OxyContin, a prescription drug, helps to relieve pain, but it has demonstrated that misuse can lead to death.

Drug Use Down in Big Cities, Up in Small Towns
The FBI noted that the rates for drug crimes has dropped 11.2 percent over the last five years in U.S. cities with more than 250,000 residents, but in rural areas the rate of arrests for drug crimes has risen 10.5 percent. For example, Detroit, Washington, or New Orleans typically have the highest homicide rates in the U.S., but for the last two years rural Jefferson Davis County, Mississippi, had the highest homicide rate in the country (50 per 100,000).

Fewer High-School Students Smoking
A recent nationwide government survey shows that smoking among high-school students has declined to its lowest level in a decade. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 28.5 percent of high-school students said they smoked last year, a drop from 36.4 percent five years ago. Officials attribute the decline to increased cigarette taxes, school programs that discourage students from smoking, and anti-tobacco messages that air nationwide.
Black Americans More Likely to Die from Lung Cancer

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that Black Americans die from lung cancer at a rate of 46 per 100,000, or about 20 percent higher rate than whites and more than three times the rate for Latin Americans. Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, director of CDC added that the report validated the importance of targeting and tailoring public health campaigns to specific groups.

Study Shows Why It's Hard to Quit Smoking

Kenneth Perkins, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, conducted three separate analyses to study nicotine tolerance in three groups of smokers at various stages of quitting. The results of the study found that all three groups had the same nicotine-tolerance response level. Perkins says, "We did not expect the tolerance levels to nicotine to be so permanent. It shows that once you become hooked on cigarettes, your response to nicotine can never return to the pre-smoking state. Tolerance can explain why someone can rapidly go back to a pack a day, even after not smoking for a long time." Before the current data, researchers thought that once someone quits smoking, the nicotine tolerance level dropped.

Nicotine Fixes

Ariva®, flavored with eucalyptus and mint, resembles a Tic Tac, but its main ingredients are compressed tobacco and nicotine. The manufacturer, Star Scientific, calls Ariva a “cigarette” because it hopes that smokers will substitute their product for cigarettes when they are in places that forbid smoking. Other products, such as Nicotine Water and Nicorette, are intended to be “nicotine-replacement therapy” for smokers wanting to quit smoking, but critics argue that Ariva may create more nicotine dependence or encourage others to continue smoking.

New Smokeless, Spitless Tobacco Introduced

Last summer, the U.S. Smoking Tobacco Company introduced a smokeless, spitless, tobacco called Revel®. Revel is a small paper packet of fresh mint and tobacco that users place in their mouth. Without chewing, nicotine and flavor is released and then the packet is removed similar to a piece of gum, eliminating the need for spitting. President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Matthew Myers, says, “If this product prevents individuals from quitting rather than switching, it will only contribute to the public-health harms of tobacco. This product appears to keep people smoking who might otherwise quit.” The manufacturer is test-marketing Revel in Topeka, Kansas, and other cities.

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Alcohol & Other Drug Education Service
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