

January 3, 2007

Liquor Industry's Deceptive Advertising Contributes to Teen Drinking

Dear Editor:

Renz Addiction Counseling Center urges citizens and state legislature to act against alcopop producers who are worsening the problem of underage drinking and driving among teens in Illinois. Alcopops – such as *Smirnoff Ice*, *Mike's Hard Lemonade*, and *Bacardi Silver* – start with a malt liquor base, and then add hard liquor and sweet flavors to create a taste that appeals to teens. The alcohol industry advertises them under looser beer and wine rules and calls them “flavored malt beverages” or “low-alcohol refreshers” yet distilled hard liquor accounts for up to 49% of the alcohol volume.

The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth documented that alcopop advertising in 2001 exposed youth to 60 percent more print advertising per capita than adults. This advertising is working, too—the American Medical Association in 2004 found that one-third of teenaged girls (age 12-18 years old) and one-fifth of teenaged boys have tried alcopops. According to research by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, adolescents who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21. Additionally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration stated that one of every five teens at the wheel of a fatal crash was legally drunk in 2005.

These statistics are staggering and avoidable. Many of us remember fighting against “Joe Camel” promoting smoking to youngsters. We can wage and win the same war against alcopop producers. Urge your state legislators to classify alcopops as distilled spirits. Help ban the advertising of this hard alcohol to our youth and you will be helping our teens stay safe.

Sincerely,

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