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Announcement

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Big Alcohol's Cross-over Brands Creating Confusion, Health Risks

SAN RAFAEL, CA -- Alcohol companies are finding increasingly dangerous ways to hook the nation's youth and fuel the underage drinking epidemic. That is the conclusion of a new report, *Alcohol, Energy Drinks, and Youth: A Dangerous Mix*, released by Marin Institute at the Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center annual conference in Orlando. The report examines the alcohol industry's youth-oriented marketing tactics promoting the consumption of alcoholic energy drinks, such as Bud Extra, Tilt, Sparks, and Rockstar 21.

"The alcohol industry is irresponsibly marketing alcoholic energy drinks to youth," says Michele Simon, JD, MPH, Research and Policy Director for Marin Institute and co-author of the report with James Mosher of Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. "They boast that their products will enhance energy and alertness, in potential violation of federal law," says Simon.

Alcoholic energy drink producers have built on the popularity of non-alcoholic energy drinks by promoting the mixing of energy drink products with alcohol and by marketing premixed alcoholic energy drinks in cans that look virtually identical to their non-alcoholic cousins.

"Alcohol producers are taking advantage of the popularity of non-alcoholic energy drinks to sell their products to youth," added Mosher. "They package their

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products so that they are indistinguishable from non-alcoholic energy drinks, confusing consumers, retailers, parents, law enforcement officers, and others who can't tell which drinks contain alcohol and which do not."

Mixing alcohol with energy drinks presents several potential health and safety risks. While young people may think that caffeine, a stimulant, masks the intoxicating effects of alcohol, research shows this is not the case. As a result, people drinking these products may mistakenly think they are less drunk than they are, and engage in dangerous activities. Youth are especially vulnerable to health and safety problems from consuming alcoholic energy drinks because they are more likely to take risks and suffer from higher rates of alcohol problems, including traffic accidents, violence, sexual assault, and suicide.

In April, 29 state attorneys general sent a letter to Anheuser-Busch expressing their concern over Spykes, an alcoholic energy drink packaged in colorful 2-ounce plastic bottles with obvious appeal to youth. The objections of law enforcement officials as well as parents, leading public health organizations and alcohol advocacy groups caused Anheuser-Busch to pull Spykes, but numerous similar products remain on the market, with more in the pipeline.

"We call upon makers of alcoholic energy drinks, including Miller Brewing Company and Anheuser-Busch, to stop selling these products." Simon said. "Our report also recommends that the federal government and state attorneys general investigate potentially deceptive marketing, particularly aimed at youth. In the meantime, local communities and state legislatures should consider banning these products to protect our youth from being targeted by Big Alcohol."

[Click here](#) for additional information and the full report.

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