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Petition calls for FDA to regulate energy drinks

BY ELIZABETH WEISE • GANNETT NEWS SERVICE • OCTOBER 28, 2008

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One hundred scientists and physicians have written a letter to the Food and Drug Administration asking for more regulation of increasingly popular energy drinks because their high caffeine content puts young drinkers at possible risk for caffeine intoxication and higher rates of alcohol-related injuries.

The letter was written by Roland Griffiths, a neuroscientist at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore. It asked the FDA to require the drinks' caffeine content be listed on the can, to set a limit on the amount of stimulant allowed in the drinks and to require warning labels.

The U.S. market for the drinks is estimated at \$5.4 billion in 2006, according to Packaged Facts, growing at an annual rate of 55 percent per year.

The United States is the world's largest consumer by volume of energy drinks, roughly 290 million gallons in 2007, according to Zenith International, a British consulting group. Americans drink 3.8 quarts per person per year.

Griffiths was also senior author on a September paper on caffeinated energy drinks in the journal "Drug and Alcohol Dependence."

Red Bull, the best-selling energy drink in the USA, contains 80 milligrams of caffeine per 8.3-ounce can, says spokeswoman Patrice Radden, about the equivalent of a cup of coffee. She says that's well below the 400-milligram-per-day caffeine limit at which "the general population is not at risk from potential adverse effects from caffeine," according to health authorities worldwide.

The drinks are aggressively marketed to young men as performance enhancers, with ads and promotions often linked to extreme sports. The market in the USA began with the introduction of Red Bull in 1997 and has expanded rapidly. The drinks are advertised as able to increase endurance, reaction time and concentration, with names such as Full Throttle, Amp Energy and No Fear.

It's the wide variations between brands that are a danger, Griffiths says.



Caffeine is just one of the reasons parents might worry about energy drinks. Some drinks include such obscure ingredients as milkweed extract and horny goat weed extract. (Gannett News Service)

QUICK CAFFEINE RUNDOWN

Top-selling energy drinks Caffeine (mg) Can size (oz)

- Amp 75 8.4
- Full Throttle 144 16
- Monster 160 16
- No Fear 174 16
- Red Bull 80 8.3
- Rockstar 160 16
- SoBe Adrenaline Rush 79 8.3
- Tab Energy 95 10.5

High-caffeine energy drinks

- BookKoo Energy 360 24
- Fixx 500 20
- Wired X505 505 24

Other beverages

"You can pick up a can and drink it and get 50 milligrams, which is the amount in a Mountain Dew, or pick one up and get 500 milligrams, and that's enough to put someone who hasn't built up a tolerance to caffeine into caffeine intoxication, resulting in nervousness, anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, tremors and rapid heart rate," Griffiths says.

In a statement, the American Beverage Association says lumping mainstream energy drinks with moderate amounts of caffeine with "companies seeking attention and increased sales based solely on extreme names and caffeine content" was unhelpful.

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- Brewed coffee 77-150 6
- Coca-Cola Classic 34.5 12
- Dr. Pepper 41 12
- Mountain Dew 54 12
- Pepsi-Cola 38 12

- Source: Packaged Facts, Roland Griffiths

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