



Consumer Federation of America

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Consumers Won't Receive the Gift of Information on Alcoholic Beverages this Holiday Season

For consumers planning on drinking or serving alcoholic beverages this holiday season, one gift they won't be getting is the gift of information. That's because the federal government continues to delay a proposal to provide consumers with basic nutrition and alcohol facts on containers of beer, wine and spirits.

"Alcoholic beverages can contribute a significant amount of calories to the diet," said Chris Waldrop, director of the Food Policy Institute at Consumer Federation of America (CFA). "Unfortunately for consumers wanting to watch their weight during the holidays, they aren't able to turn to the label to get the information they need, like they can with other food products."

Alcoholic beverages are the only major category of consumable products not required to be labeled with information about the basic characteristics of the product. Adequate labeling information can serve as a tool to help reduce alcohol abuse, drunk driving, obesity, and the many diseases attributable to excessive alcohol intake.

In the absence of government action on labeling of alcoholic beverages, Consumer Federation of America in 2008 released a useful chart comparing the calorie and alcohol content of several major brands of beer, wine and distilled spirits. The chart is available here:
http://consumerfed.org/elements/www.consumerfed.org/file/food/CFA_Alcohol_Facts_Poster_FINAL.pdf

"Consumers need basic information about alcohol content to help them drink in moderation as recommended by the federal government and numerous health groups," Waldrop said. "For example, consumers need to know that a 12 ounce bottle of beer has generally the same amount of alcohol as a 5 ounce glass of wine and 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits."

In 2007, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) proposed a rule to require a standardized "Alcohol Facts" panel on all beer, wine and distilled spirits products. Four years later, TTB has yet to finalize that proposal. CFA and other public interest groups have called on TTB to mandate alcohol information on a standardized label, including the serving size, number of servings per container, percentage alcohol by volume and the amount of alcohol (in fl oz) per serving, as well as calorie information. CFA has also urged TTB to require that alcoholic beverage labels contain a statement defining "moderate" drinking, derived from the U.S. Government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and the definition of a standard drink.

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Especially during the holidays, CFA urges consumer to remember these points:

- It's not what you drink, it's how much that counts. Don't be fooled into thinking that beer or wine is safer or less potent than the "hard stuff." Remember, 12 ounces of beer has the same amount of alcohol as 5 ounces of wine and 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach. Eat food while you drink and alternate water or other nonalcoholic drinks with your alcoholic beverage.
- In many cases, alcohol and medications don't mix. Always read the label to determine if the prescription medicine or over-the-counter drug carries a specific warning about consuming alcohol.
- If you're going to be drinking when you go out, plan ahead of time how you will get home. Designate a driver, have a taxi number, and money ready to pay the taxi. Whatever you do, don't drink and drive.
- If you are hosting a party, keep an eye out for those who may have had too much to drink and planning to drive home. If necessary, take their keys and call a taxi.
- Whether you are a parent, family member or a friend, don't serve to or buy alcohol for people under 21.

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Consumer Federation of America is an association of nearly 300 non-profit consumer organizations that was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy.