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Feature Story

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A recent craze has taken many college campuses by storm and is causing some officials to become concerned. The alcoholic energy drink Four Loko has become very popular with many college students, but some believe the drink is dangerous and a threat to students' health.

The drink contains 12 percent alcohol and is sold in several flavors, including fruit punch, grape, watermelon, orange, lemonade, cranberry lemonade, lemon-lime and blue raspberry. It contains the alcohol equivalent of 5.6 regular drinks and the caffeine equivalent of three to four cans of Coca-Cola.

Critics of Four Loko say that the beverage targets teens and young people with its sweet, fruity flavors and brightly-colored packaging. Four Loko argues that many types of liquor and beer have some of the same flavors and similar packaging.

Another criticism of Four Loko is that it mixes alcohol and caffeine, which many believe is an unsafe or even deadly combination. There have been several recent hospitalizations and deaths linked to Four Loko.

On Nov. 17, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a warning letter to Phusion Projects, makers of Four Loko, as well as three other makers of alcoholic energy drinks, saying their products were unsafe and illegal. The FDA ordered the companies to reformulate the drinks within 15 days. If the companies did not do so, the FDA threatened to seek a court order banning them from selling their products altogether.

The makers of Four Loko have agreed to remove caffeine, guarana and taurine from their products and have said they are taking the necessary steps to do so. They will only produce non-caffeinated versions of the drink.

IUP junior and Four Loko-drinker Michael Spafferty from Moon, Pa., believes the FDA is overreacting.

"I do drink Four Lokos but I honestly don't see anything wrong with them," said Spafferty. "Lots of people mix alcohol and caffeine and I don't know why all of the sudden Four Loko is getting a bad rap for it. I understand that some deaths have been linked to the product, but tons of deaths are linked to alcohol all the time."

"You don't see them banning alcohol altogether whenever someone has an alcohol-related death, so why Four Loko?"

Spafferty believes it's up to consumers to use common sense.

"I think moderation is the key to drinking safely and I don't see any reason why they need to ban or take the caffeine out of Four Loko," he said. "I think that people who drink them just need to be more responsible. I don't drink five of them at a time."

Some students do not support Four Lokos as strongly as others.

IUP junior Jaimie Marie from Harrisburg, Pa., believes that the alcohol in Four Loko is the problem, not the caffeine.

"From my experience with Four Lokos, I don't think they affect me any differently than any other drink. They do seem to get me drunk faster, but I don't think the caffeine is the reason. I don't

feel overly energized when I drink them, I just feel like I'm intoxicated the same way I would feel drinking anything else. I don't think the caffeine is the problem, I think it's the alcohol content."

Marie disagrees with the FDA's approach.

"I think the FDA is wasting their time and if they really want to make the drinks safer maybe they should lower the alcohol content," she said.

Some students at IUP are very against Four Loko and say they wish it would be banned.

IUP senior Brittney Guglielmi from Philadelphia, Pa., has seen the effects of Four Loko and believes the drink is dangerous.

"I don't have any personal experience with Four Loko because I've never drank one, but my roommate drinks them all the time," said Guglielmi. "She buys them by the case and I think it's out of hand. When she drinks Four Loko she gets crazy and I actually told her one day that she was going to die from drinking them."

Sources:

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