



MICAP RECAP

April 2007

(A Publication of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems)

APRIL IS ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH

One of MICAP's sister organizations, on the National Level, The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) lifts April up as Alcohol Awareness Month. CSPI has pulled together some facts about the abuse of alcoholic beverages which you'll never hear from the purveyors of alcoholic beverages (whether of beer, wine, distilled spirits, or the makers of the new ALCOPOPS (see next article in this MICAP-RECAP). They are as follows:

- The alcoholic-beverage industry relies on "heavy- and addicted-drinking" for the largest share of its profits. Hazardous drinking (5 or more drinks at one sitting) accounts for more than 50% of the alcohol industry's \$155 billion market, and more than 75% of the beer industry's market.
- Underage alcohol use is more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined. More than 1,700 college students in the U.S. are killed each year -- about 4.65 per day -- as a result of alcohol-related injuries.
- Underage drinking spawns future "heavy- and addicted-drinking" on which the industry depends for most of its sales. People who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop dependency upon alcohol at some time in their lives compared with those whose first drink was at age 20 or older.
- Nearly 14 million Americans -- one in every 13 adults -- abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. And fewer than 25% of those who need treatment get it in a given year.
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) are the leading preventable cause of birth defects in the U.S., affecting as many as 40,000 babies per year and costing upwards of \$5.4 billion per year. (Note: Our December, 2006 Newsletter was devoted to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. For free copies, E-mail us at micap101@sbcglobal.net or write us to: MICAP, PO Box 10212, Lansing, Michigan, 48901).
- Some 75% of husbands or wives who abuse their spouses have been drinking prior to, or at the time of the abuse.
- Health risks of drinking include increased incidence of cancers of the liver, esophagus, throat, and larynx (voice box), as well as liver Cirrhosis, immune system problems, brain damage, and heart problems.
- To avoid health risks associated with alcohol, the U.S. Depts. Of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Agriculture (USDA) advise those who drink to do so in moderation -- **defined as consuming no more than one drink per day for women, and up to two drinks per day for men.**
- Alcohol is implicated in the deaths of some 85,000 Americans every year, making it the nation's third leading cause of preventable death after smoking and obesity.
- Drunk driving accounts for about 16,000 alcohol-related deaths per year, only about 25% of all alcohol-related deaths. One-quarter of all emergency room admissions, one-third of all suicides, and more than half of all homicides and incidents of domestic violence are alcohol-related.

ALCOPOPS CONTRIBUTE TO UNDER-AGE DRINKING

by Rev. W. J. (Bill) Amundsen, Chairperson, MICAP Board of Directors

I'm showing my age! I thought "alcopops" were a popsicle-like frozen bar with a liquid center filled with an alcoholic beverage of some sort. Right? WRONG! Alcopops have nothing to do with popsicles!

The "pop" in Alcopops is more closely related to the "pop" in soda-pop. Except that it's not a soft drink like "rootbeer" or "7-Up." The "pop" in Alcopop is an alcoholic beverage which has been brewed and sweetened and flavored to disguise its real content.

Alcopops are a fermented malt beverage to which LOTS of sugar and a fruity flavor has been added. In some cases, producers have also added distilled spirits such as vodka or rum. The result is something called Alcopop which has the beer flavor, or the hard-drink flavor, disguised as lemonade or some other fruity taste. They come with various brand names, including, but not limited to the following: Mike's Hard Lemonade, Smirnoff Ice, Doc Otis' Hard Lemonade, Rick's Spiked Hard Lemonade, Jed's, Hooper's Hooch, Bacardi Silver, Skyy Blue, Stolichnaya, Tequiza, Sublime, and One-Eyed Jack.

What is the legal drinking age for Alcopops? You guessed it: Age 21! That would be good, except that the producers and marketers of Alcopops have them dressed up in bottles that look like soda-bottles that appeal to youth. They have bright designs and colors such as fruit-drink bottles have, and they're frequently sold in the "soft-drink" or "fruit juice" sections of the grocery or convenience stores. Dr. George Hacker, CSPI's director for Alcohol Policies said in a recent News Conference: "Booze merchants formulate the products and the design of their labeling and packaging specifically to appeal to those who don't like the taste of alcohol, which includes teenagers."

The liquor industry as a whole says this is just a new brew aimed at adults. In fact, the labels indicate that the purchaser must be 21 years of age to purchase the Alcopops. But in two independent studies commissioned by CSPI, both youth and adults believe that these "Starter-Suds," "Cross-Over-Drinks," and/or "Malternatives" (as they are variously called) are intended primarily for youth.

While the liquor industry claims to target 25- to 35-year-olds, industry sources admit that these drinks "bridge" young, inexperienced drinkers from soft drinks to stronger alcoholic beverages. Studies show, however, that 14 - 16 year olds find Alcopops particularly attractive.

Returning to the question asked earlier: "What is wrong with Alcopops?" we begin to find the answer in

the production, the marketing and the labeling of the product.

We know, for example, that persons who begin drinking alcoholic beverages before age 15 are 4 to 5 times more likely to become alcohol-dependent in their life-time than persons who refrain from the use of alcoholic beverages until after age 21.

We know, too, that alcohol factors in and contributes to the 4 leading causes of death to persons ages 10 - 24, including: a) Motor Vehicle Crashes, Unintentional Injuries, c) Homicides, and d) Suicides.

So, we raise serious questions about the deceit involved with trying to disguise an alcoholic beverage as a soft drink which our young people will choose over beer. In the youth poll about Alcopops, over half of the teens indicated that they and their friends choose "alcopops" over beer or cocktails because of the product attributes: sweet taste, hide the taste of alcohol, and easy to drink.

Also, since beverage alcohol is not only a "Gateway Drug" to other drugs, but also a "Gateway" to risky life-style choices, it behooves us to try to limit the exposure of our children and youth to alcoholic beverages. In that vein, of those who begin drinking alcoholic beverages before age 15, 67% will also try another ILLICIT drug. Children who drink alcoholic beverages are even more likely to try an illicit drug, use marijuana, or use cocaine than their counter-parts who never drank as children.

We also know that alcohol abuse is the largest (albeit LEGAL) drug problem in the United States. The cost to our nation is \$53 Billion Dollars annually for the youth problem alone. The total cost for all age groups is almost \$184 Billion Dollars annually.

How are Alcopops available to youth when the label clearly indicates that you have to be 21 to purchase them? The alcohol industry is counting on illegal sales in order to sell alcopops to our youth. When we add the fact that the youth studies show that Alcopops are "easy" to get by 84% of teens polled, and "very easy" to get by 46% of teens polled we have a job to do in our churches, communities, families, and our State Liquor Control Commission to educate purveyors of "alcopops" about accountability regarding the laws and consequences of making alcoholic beverages available to underage drinkers.

Researchers, who appeared underage on purpose, attempted to purchase alcohol, and succeeded 50% of the time, no questions asked. It is easy for underage

children and youth in our society to purchase alcoholic beverages.

Clearly, the making available by the liquor industry, of “alcopops” (cross-over drinks), and targeting them toward youth in our culture raises ethical questions about what we allow to happen to our youth.

To get at that question, the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s commissioned a telephone poll of 500 adults (21 years of age and older) about the opinions and attitudes of Americans on the subject of marketing the “alcopops” to underage persons. Adults across our land are concerned about the marketing of “alcopops” to teenagers and support restrictions on the marketing of “alcopops” to youth.

Over 80% of adults support labeling “alcopops” with clear indications of alcohol content and the quote: “THIS IS NOT A SOFT DRINK.”

Other findings in the telephone poll indicate that 75% of adults favor restrictions on the types of stores where “alcopops” can be sold in order to make it more difficult for underage persons to buy them.

Finally, the poll indicated that adults would support policies to ensure that “alcopops” are separated from non-alcoholic beverages both on store shelves and in store coolers (72% support).

Dr. George Hacker, quoted above, also has indicated that it is high time for government to declare our children off limits to alcohol producers; and the

Acting Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Kenneth Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H., issued a **Call to Action on Underage Drinking** on March 6, 2007.

Part of the ANational Call@ is reprinted in what follows:

“Too many Americans consider underage drinking a rite of passage to adulthood. Besides the statistics indicating early drinking leads to alcohol-related problems later in life, research also shows that alcohol may harm the developing adolescent brain. The availability of the research provides more reasons than ever before for parents and other adults to protect the health and safety of our nation=s children....The 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health estimates there are 11 million underage drinkers in the U.S.A. Nearly 7.2 million are considered binge drinkers, typically meaning they drank more than 5 drinks on occasion, and more than two million are classified as heavy drinkers.”

“The National Call,” was developed in collaboration with the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the Substance Abuse and

Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and identifies six goals:

- Foster changes in society that facilitate healthy adolescent development and that help prevent and reduce underage drinking.
- Engage parents, schools, communities, all levels of government, all social systems that interface with youth, and youth themselves in a coordinated national effort to prevent and reduce underage drinking and its consequences.
- Promote an understanding of underage alcohol consumption in the context of human development and maturation that takes into account individual adolescent characteristics as well as environmental, ethnic, cultural, and gender differences.
- Conductadditionalresearchonadolescentalcohol use and its relationship to development.
- Work to improve public health surveillance on underage drinking and on population-based risk factors for this behavior.
- Work to ensure that policies at all levels are consistent with the national goal of preventing and reducing underage alcohol consumption.

“The National Call” by the Acting Surgeon General closes with these words: “Alcohol remains the most heavily abused substance by America’s youth,...and we can no longer ignore what alcohol is doing to our children.”

Copies of the Acting Surgeon General’s Call to Action on Underage Drinking are available from the web-site of the Surgeon General’s Office as follows: <www.surgeongeneral.gov>

2007 ANNUAL MEETING

The 2007 Annual Meeting of AADIF-MICAP will take place on May 8, 2007 (the second Tuesday) at the Central United Methodist Church, 215 North Capitol Avenue, Lansing, Michigan, from Noon to 3:00 p.m. The Agenda will include an educational item, election of officers, and reports on the ministry of AADIF and MICAP during the past year. Eligible voters are persons that contributed to MICAP and/or AADIF in 2006.

The Program for the Annual Meeting will include election of officers and reports from the past year as well as adopting a budget for 2007.

Additionally, we have invited a speaker from the Michigan Liquor Control Commission to tell of the work of the Commission.

Please let us know of your intention to be present by calling (517) 484-1770, or sending your name(s) to MICAP, PO Box 10212, Lansing, Michigan 48901.

FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS

2007 meetings:

2nd Quarter Meeting: See Above
3rd Quarter Meeting: Aug. 13, 2007
4th Quarter Meeting: Nov. 12, 2007

2008 meeting:

1st Quarter Meeting, Feb. 12, 2008

Unless otherwise announced, meetings are held at Central United Methodist Church, 215 North Capital Avenue, Lansing, Michigan 48933

WANTED: E-MAIL ADDRESSES

In order for MICAP/AADIF to be more effective, it will be helpful to garner e-mail addresses from members, constituents, and other persons interested in our ministry. Please send such addresses to our e-mail address: <micap101@sbcglobal.net>

EXPANDING MICAP'S MAILING LIST

In order to reach more persons, we are trying to expand our mailing list. Most of us have friends and colleagues who value the same values which we value. If you have a friend whom you believe would appreciate the ministry of MICAP, please E-Mail their names and addresses to micap101@sbcglobal.net OR, send their names and addresses to us at MICAP, PO Box 10212, Lansing, Michigan, 48901. Thank You.

YOUR SUPPORT IS APPRECIATED

Kind THANKS to each of you who used the enclosed envelope from the December, 2006 Newsletter. Your generosity enables the ministry of AADIF/MICAP to continue. We have enclosed another envelope for your consideration. We feel that the contacts we make throughout Michigan help to educate and make a difference in the lives of those whom we touch. Thank you for your continued support.

THE MICAP ENDOWMENT FUND

Most of you know that we are operating with a volunteer staff at present. Despite the lack of regular staff, we believe our volunteers continued to offer good information for our constituents. If we could hire a part-time staff person, imagine how much more information and programs could be conveyed to our constituents.

The reports of the record-levels of underage drinking (refer to the Acting Surgeon General's report elsewhere in this paper) menacing our youth throughout our nation cry out for more to be done.

AADIF/MICAP has a dream and a goal of building an endowment of \$100,000.00, the proceeds of which would help to partially fund the AADIF/MICAP ministry in the years ahead. That would be a start toward staffing an agency capable of meeting the heavy challenges which lie before us. If you are interested in helping in that project, please let me know of your interest and I will help you partner with us for the future ministry of AADIF/MICAP. You can contact me at 517.323.2445, or e-mail me at wjamundsen@juno.com.