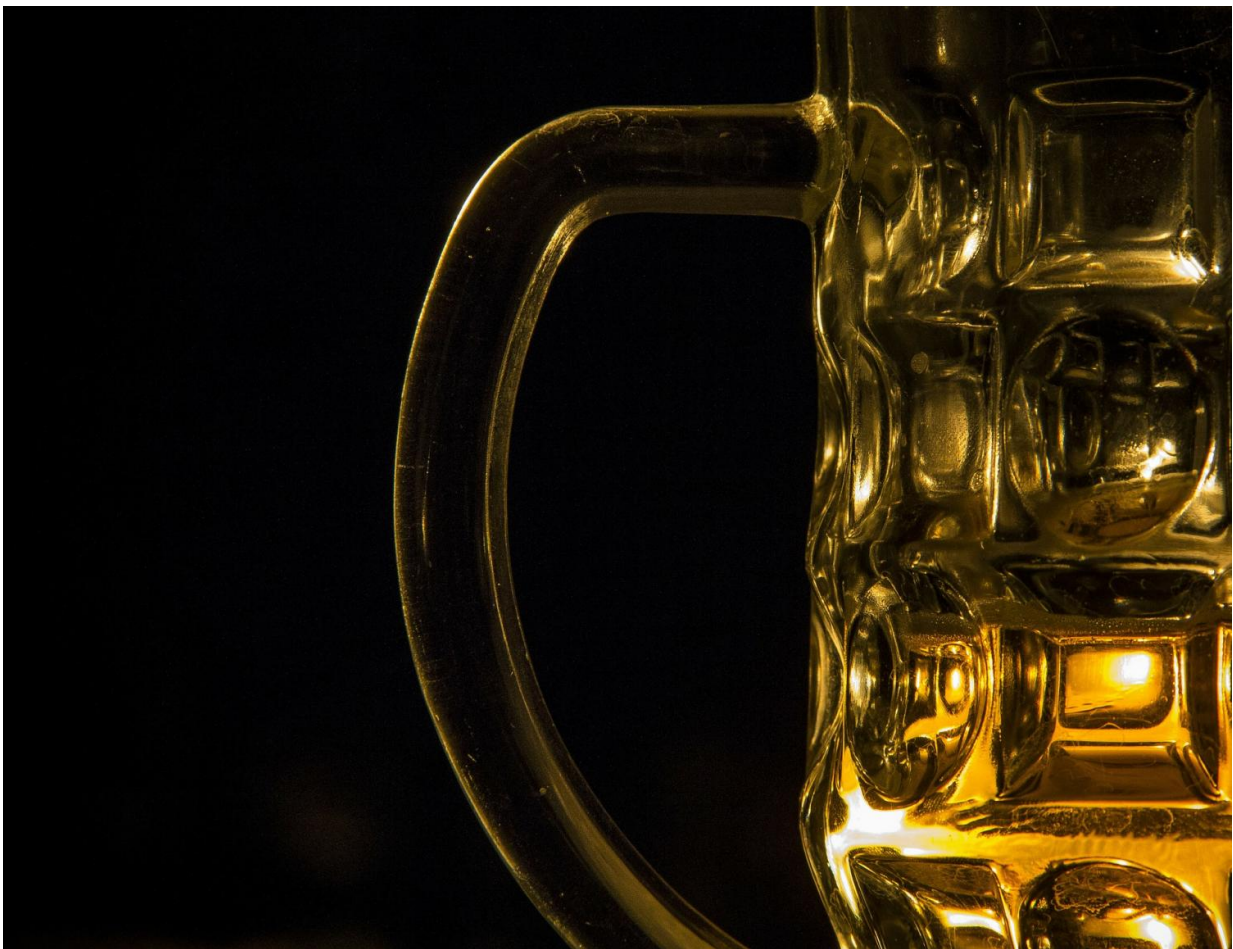


UK's voluntary pledge to provide calorie content information for alcoholic drinks fails to make significant progress

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Alcoholic beverage producers and retailers in the UK are failing to provide consumers with information on the calorie content of alcoholic drinks. According to new research reported in *Public Health*, the voluntary pledge by the UK industry in 2011 to provide information on alcohol calories has not led to any significant provision of this information to consumers. The study found that calorie information only appeared on the labels of around 1% of products examined, it was not present in any of the supermarket branches visited in the study, and it was not routinely provided on supermarkets' websites.

Alcohol is a major source of "hidden" calories in the diet of adults who drink and a significant contributor to obesity. Among adults who drink, it is estimated that about 8% of their [daily calorie intake](#) comes from [alcohol](#). In the UK, the NHS Choices website indicates that the average wine drinker in England consumes around 2,000 calories (kcal) from alcohol every month. Two large glasses of white wine a day would provide women with nearly 20% of their recommended daily calorie intake, and five pints of lager a week adds up to 44,200 calories over a year, equivalent to eating 221 doughnuts. However, no country in the world currently requires the [calorie content](#) of alcohol to be stated on packaging.

A recent European Commission report on the mandatory labelling of alcoholic beverages suggested that industry appears to be increasingly willing to adopt voluntary initiatives to offer nutritional information, citing commitments by some alcohol producers. However, relatively little is known about how and to what extent such pledges have been implemented.

In 2011, alcohol retailers and producers in England pledged to provide consumers with information on the calorie content of alcoholic drinks as part of the Public Health Responsibility Deal (RD). One of the core commitments made by participating organizations was to "foster a

culture of responsible drinking, which will help people to drink within guidelines." Upon signing on to the RD, organizations were asked to provide pledge delivery plans setting out how they would deliver on each pledge they had selected and to send annual progress reports to the Department of Health.

"Alcohol contributes significant calories to the diet of even moderate drinkers, and provision of calorie information to consumers is a potentially important way of helping them reduce their calorie intake if they so wish," explained lead investigator Mark Petticrew, PhD, of the Policy Innovation Research Unit at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

This study examines what has been achieved and considers the implications for current industry commitments to provide information on alcohol calories.

Seventy percent of signatories to the pledges made no clear commitment to provide information or made no mention of calorie labeling in their pledge delivery plans.

Progress reports were only available for a minority of signatories in 2012 and 2013. Most signatories (86%) provided progress reports in 2014, but the majority (74%) did not mention alcohol calories.

Researchers also visited 55 stores in the South of England from June to September 2014 to assess the extent of calorie information provided in the alcohol sections of the stores. The sample included five city-based stores from each of 10 leading supermarkets and one major wine retailer, all of which had pledged to provide calorie information. They also examined the online shopping websites (where available) of each supermarket to check what calorie information was provided on three specific alcohol products (white wine, beer, and vodka); assessed what

information was provided about the calorie and unit content of any of these products; and searched elsewhere on the supermarket websites and on their Facebook pages for information on alcohol calories.

Additionally, the researchers examined data for 156 alcohol products to see if they reported calorie information on the label, and found that such information was very rarely provided - it appeared on only about 1% of products.

No information was provided in any of the stores. Calorie information was not routinely provided on supermarkets' websites, nor on product labels (two out of 156 products examined). Fourteen signatories mentioned calorie information in their progress reports but in most cases, had not provided information directly to consumers, or only in a very limited fashion.

The investigators conclude that one of the stated purposes of the RD to provide consumers with the information to make informed health-related choices, including providing information on the calorie content of [alcoholic drinks](#), did not take place to any significant extent.

"Few of the organizations that committed to act on this issue as part of the RD had taken specific action to provide consumers with alcohol calorie information in either their physical or online stores," commented Prof. Petticrew. "The public is in favor of alcohol calorie labeling - lack of provision of information on alcohol calories makes it more difficult for people to make informed choices about their own health. Provision of alcohol [calorie information](#) would potentially contribute to measures to address the problem of adult obesity. The voluntary implementation of alcohol calorie labelling by industry needs to continue to be carefully monitored to determine whether and how it is done."

More information: M. Petticrew et al, Provision of information to

consumers about the calorie content of alcoholic drinks: did the Responsibility Deal pledge by alcohol retailers and producers increase the availability of calorie information?, *Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.puhe.2017.04.020](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2017.04.020)

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