

Stimulant-enhanced beverages add new danger to alcohol consumption

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(PhysOrg.com) -- With growing concern about college students drinking stimulant-enhanced alcoholic beverages, the University of Rhode Island banned such drinks from campus.

The University announced Wednesday that URI President David M. Dooley approved the ban of beverages like Four Loko because URI officials believe such beverages pose a health risk equal to or greater than grain alcohol, tap systems, drinking games, and common source containers, all of which are already banned in the URI Student Handbook.

The national media recently reported an incident involving nine freshmen women at Central Washington University who were hospitalized after drinking at a party. At first, authorities believed the women had their drinks spiked by drugs. It turned out that all nine women reported drinking Four Lokos that night. Since that incident, Central Washington University and Ramapo College in New Jersey have banned Four Loko and other stimulant-enhanced alcoholic beverages on their campuses. In addition, a number of state attorneys general, including New York and New Jersey, and the Federal [Food and Drug Administration](#) are investigating the legality of selling stimulant-enhanced alcoholic beverages.

Four Loko is of particular concern given that it is 12 percent alcohol by volume, and comes in 23.5-ounce cans. This means that each can of Four Loko is the equivalent of 4.7 standard drinks.

With high doses of caffeine and alcohol in one beverage, drinks like Four Loko make for a dangerous product.

"When you drink alcohol, eventually you feel tired and start to feel down because it is a depressant," said Dan Graney assistant director of URI's Office of Student Life for Substance Abuse Prevention.

"When you add the caffeine, you stay up

emotionally. You still get the high from the the alcohol, but you also have the buzz of the caffeine."

Unlike regular alcoholic beverages that cause the body to trigger itself to slow down, the stimulant-enhanced [alcoholic beverages](#) keep a person more alert, leading them to drink even more.

"With these drinks, you are not getting that 'slow down' or tired affect until you ultimately pass out or throw up. By then, it's too late to slow down," Graney said.

Beyond the dangerous combination of high alcohol content and caffeine, these drinks are also marketed differently. The packaging is designed more like the energy drinks of Red Bull, Monster or Rockstar than any other alcoholic drinks. In states that allow alcohol to be sold in convenience stores, beverages like Four Loko are often shelved alongside the energy drinks.

"They do not advertise them as an energy drink, but they are branded just like them," Graney said. "If you go to their web site, they make a point of saying it is not an energy drink. But the cans look alike."

With a fruity, very sweet flavor, drinks like Four Loko are marketed for faster consumption than other alcohol. At \$2.50 or \$3 a can, it is a cheaper, faster way to get inebriated.

"It is very popular with the 'pre-gaming' and binge-drinking culture prevalent on college campuses," Graney said. "It is essentially four drinks in one can. It is almost the definition of binge drinking.

"You get you wired so you can continue to drink. Many students might have one or two cans in an hour. Would you otherwise think of having eight drinks in one hour? That's essentially what you are doing here."

Provided by University of Rhode Island

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