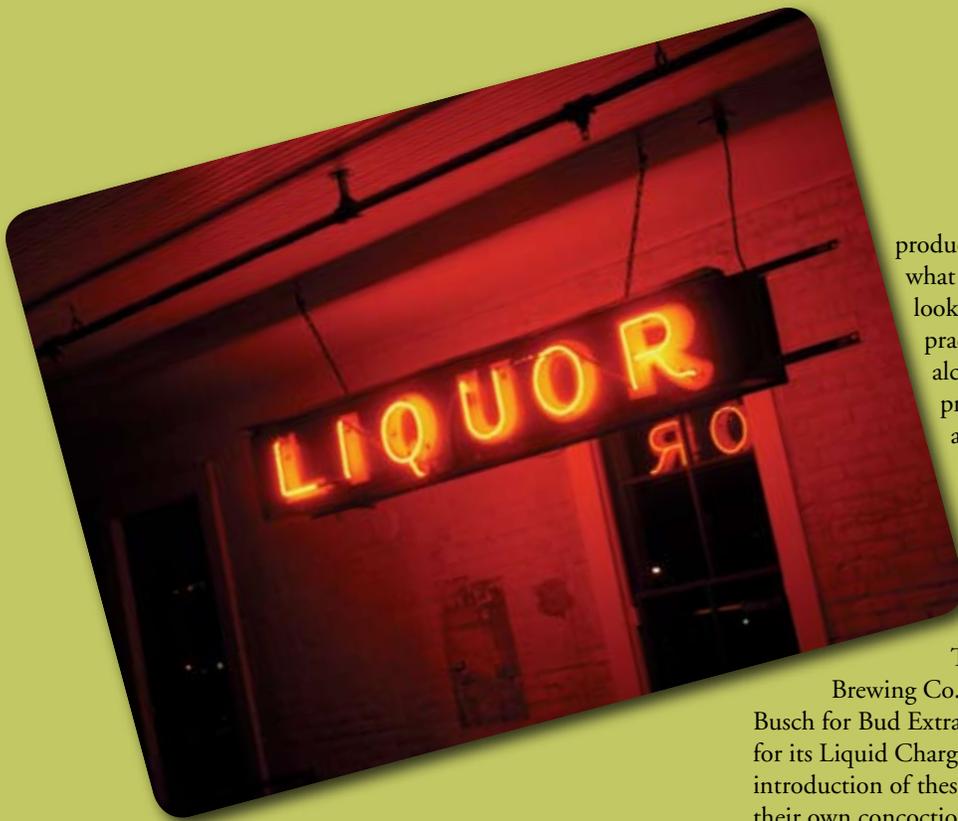


New Drug and Alcohol Trends Present Unique Challenges

By Bridget Ingebrigtsen





Trends in the teenage world are nothing new – from fashion to text-messaging lingo to the latest bands. But there are other trends out there – dangerous ones that apply to alcohol and drug abuse. And while staying current on the hottest fashions can be a lost cause for most parents, missing out on the latest drug and alcohol abuse trends could have devastating, even deadly, consequences.

Danger at the liquor counter

Teens can be sneaky and even creative when it comes to finding new ways to get drunk or high. But these days, trickery and deception aren't always necessary. Some new energy drinks containing alcohol are packaged to look like their counterparts, non-alcoholic energy drinks, often resulting in store clerks unintentionally selling liquor to minors.

The sale of alcoholic energy drinks to teenagers is a significant concern of elected officials. In August, two dozen states' attorneys general, including Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, asked federal officials to examine the ingredients and marketing of the alcoholic energy drinks they believe are aimed at underage customers. Their request was in response to a report recently released by the San Rafael, CA-based Marin Institute entitled, "Alcohol, Energy Drinks, and Youth: A Dangerous Mix."

The report stated, "Despite the sharp increase in sales of alcoholic energy drinks, their appeal to underage drinkers, and the health concerns involved in mixing stimulants with alcohol, research on the potential dangers of these

products remains limited. This study reviews what data is available and takes an in-depth look at the alcohol industry's marketing practices promoting the consumption of alcoholic energy drinks. The results, while preliminary, are unsettling. Both scientists and policymakers should focus increased attention on this emerging product category."¹ The attorneys general requested a federal investigation into the makeup of alcoholic energy drinks and flavored malt beverages.

The attorneys general singled out Miller Brewing Co. for Sparks and Sparks Plus, Anheuser-Busch for Bud Extra and Charge Beverages of Portland for its Liquid Charge and Liquid Core drinks. Prior to the introduction of these drinks, Claxon said, people would mix their own concoctions of alcohol with energy drinks, making combinations such as "Yagerbombs."

Danger on the Internet

Teens also are accessing traditional alcoholic products, such as beer and hard liquor, through the use of fake IDs, which can be found easily on the Internet. But with the proper training and knowledge, a clerk can readily identify a fake ID.

Illinois law states, "A minor convicted of purchasing, accepting, possessing or consuming alcohol and possession of false identification will have their driving privileges suspended for one year by the Illinois Secretary of State's Office." Yet, teens still are willing to take the risk of purchasing a fake ID or learning how to make their own. Again, this is where an alert, educated clerk can make a difference. Clerks have to know

The Exploding Popularity of Energy Drinks

- In 2006, 500 new energy drink products were introduced worldwide
- Annual energy drink sales total \$3.2 billion
- Thirty-one percent of 12- to 17-year-olds are regular consumers v. 22 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds

Source: *Marin Institute*

what to look for when spotting a fake ID. It involves having the person take the ID card out of their wallet.

Parents and educators should remain aware of teen Internet use as well. Monitoring sites visited or instituting parental controls can prevent teens from accessing sites offering fake IDs. The appropriate law enforcement agency also should be contacted when these sites are encountered.

Danger at home

According to the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, one in five students in America has used an inhalant to get high by the time he or she reaches the eighth grade.² Its Web site, *inhalants.org*, noted, “Parents don’t know that inhalants – cheap, legal and accessible products – are as popular among middle school students as marijuana. Even fewer know the deadly effects the poisons in these products have on the brain and body when they are inhaled or ‘huffed.’ It’s like playing Russian Roulette. The user can die the 1st, 10th or 100th time a product is misused as an inhalant.”

Research from the Illinois Drug Education Alliance found that 598,000 Illinois youth, ages 12-17, had

“The first step parents can take is to learn about inhalant abuse and resist denial that their children would abuse.”

Karel Ares, executive director, Prevention First

started abusing inhalants in the past year. In addition, the study found that girls are more likely to begin “huffing” at an earlier age than boys.

Kris Anderson, program director of Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drugs for Lake County, said her department addresses the many methods of abuse by teens, including inhalants. “We have found that most instances of inhalant use end by the time a student hits high school,” she said.

That is when alcohol and drug abuse typically starts, she said. Right now, Lake County is focusing the majority of its prevention efforts on underage alcohol abuse. Although the department recognizes inhalant abuse as a serious and dangerous threat, they believe underage alcohol abuse has the most damaging effects and

is an area where preventionists can have the greatest impact. “Focusing on alcohol use by teens is the most far-reaching thing we can do,” Anderson said.

New methods and trends will continue to emerge and challenge the prevention field’s ability to successfully and effectively combat teen substance abuse. For parents and preventionists to succeed in their prevention efforts, they must stay ahead of the curve. For further information on the latest drug and alcohol trends and how to combat this disturbing trend, go to il.drugfree.org.

¹ http://www.marininstitute.org/alcopops/energy_drink_report.htm

² <http://www.inhalants.org/nipaw.htm>

