# Alcohol label audit: August 2012

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## Summary

In Australia, alcohol products containing more than 0.5% alcohol by volume are bound by law to state the alcoholic strength and approximate number of standard drinks on the label of the product. At present, there is no mandatory requirement for the labels on alcohol products to carry a health warning.

To date, the government has agreed to move towards mandating a warning about alcohol consumption during pregnancy, and to seek further advice and research regarding more generic health messages. Some parts of the alcohol industry (through the industry-funded DrinkWise organisation) have voluntarily developed consumer information messages to be displayed on alcohol packaging. The ‘consumer information messages’ include a ‘Get the facts’ logo encouraging people to visit the DrinkWise website for information on safe alcohol consumption.

Public health advocates have expressed some concern that the primary DrinkWise message to ‘get the facts’ is not in itself a health message, and that the other messages are not strong enough to influence behaviour change. Of concern also is that the voluntary nature of the labelling initiative means there is no guarantee messages will be or remain consistent in form, placement, size and content, no guarantee they will be displayed on all products and no guarantee that appropriate messages will be displayed on relevant products. This is especially important given international evidence suggests that that warning labels have the potential to influence drinking behaviour, but only if the label design ensures labels are actually noticed, if the content of warning labels evoke visceral avoidance responses and if messages are well targeted to their intended audience (for example, messages aimed at young people are displayed on beverages commonly consumed by young people, such as pre-mixed drinks).

This research aims to evaluate the extent of implementation of the DrinkWise labelling initiative an audit of alcohol labels was undertaken. Specifically, to: estimate the proportion of alcohol products displaying the DrinkWise messages (and to investigate any other advisory labels present); determine how frequently each of the different DrinkWise messages is displayed and on what products/categories/by which producers; investigate the size and placement of DrinkWise messages and determine how this differs according to product/category.

## Outcomes

The results of this study indicate that the DrinkWise consumer information messages have not yet been broadly adopted on alcohol product packagings. Of the total sample of 250 products audited, fewer than one in six (16%, or 39 items) carried one of the DrinkWise consumer information messages.

Beer/cider products appeared more likely than wine or spirits/RTDs to carry any of the DrinkWise messages on packaging, with messages appearing on 30% of beer/cider products, 10% of wine and 6% of spirit/RTD products.

Individual DrinkWise messages featured on small proportions of products overall and within each category. The most commonly observed DrinkWise message was the ‘get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo, though this was only found on 8% of products audited. The next most commonly observed DrinkWise message was the pregnancy silhouette, found alone on 3% of products and in conjuction with the ‘get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo on a further 1% of products. Each of the other messages was found on no more than 2% of products.

DrinkWise messages do not appear to be prominently featured on product labels, appearing most commonly on the back of products, and in some instances on the side or bottom (in the case of a number of multipack products).

Finally, of the private label products that could be identified in the sample (14 brands), none carried the DrinkWise messages, and just over half (8) contained an advisory statement. All of these were plain text statements (‘enjoy in moderation’, ‘enjoy wine in moderation’ and ‘drink responsibly’) situated on the backs of bottles and often in small type.

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/IPSOS-SRI-DRINKWISE-AUDIT-REPORT-1-AUGUST-2012.pdf)

[view the errata](https://www.fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ERRATA-280912.pdf)