



Foundation for Alcohol
Research & Education

Media Release

STILL NO MESSAGE ON THE BOTTLE INDUSTRY HAS LITTLE THIRST FOR ITS OWN WARNING LABELS

26 September 2013: The alcohol industry has failed to implement its own DrinkWise warning labels with an independent audit revealing that a full two years after launch, fewer than four in 10 (37%) alcohol products carry DrinkWise consumer information messages.

Conducted for the second year by IPSOS Social Research Institute, the findings of the *Alcohol Label Audit* refute earlier exaggerated industry claims, and highlight DrinkWise's failure to deliver on its 2011 promise to ensure consumer information messages would appear on all alcohol products within two years.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says by any measure, the alcohol industry has failed miserably.

"Despite exaggerated claims to the contrary, the industry continues to drag its feet. In two years DrinkWise has only managed to roll out its consumer messages to 37 per cent of all alcohol products. That is simply embarrassing and highlights the biggest and most glaring weakness of the initiative. It can't deliver on its promises because the scheme is voluntary and the alcohol industry is not on board," Mr Thorn said.

The audit found that most DrinkWise messages remain largely hidden, with 86 per cent taking up less than 5 per cent of the label, and 93 per cent of all messages placed on the back, bottom or side of the product.

Mr Thorn says the latest audit is a further indictment of a flawed and poorly implemented regime.

"The alcohol industry cannot be trusted to develop and implement alcohol warning labels. What we need are visible, evidence-based health warnings applied consistently across all alcohol products. What we are getting instead is too few products carrying weak consumer messages that are hard to find and even harder to read," Mr Thorn said.

The audit also identified a number of differences in the application of DrinkWise messages since the 2012 audit, with the 'Kids and alcohol don't mix' message observed in 2012, not present on any audited products in 2013.

The audit also found 26 per cent of all products contained a DrinkWise message about alcohol and pregnancy.

Mr Thorn says while a slight improvement, the results fall well short of what could be considered appropriate.

“The failings we see in the DrinkWise messages around pregnancy are the same failings we see in all DrinkWise consumer messages; a lack of consistency, a lack of visibility, weak messages and extremely low adoption by the industry. The Government flagged its intention to mandate pregnancy warning labels from 2014, and in response, the best industry can muster in two years is to apply vague pregnancy related messaging to slightly more than one in four products. That’s simply not good enough,” Mr Thorn said.

An independent evaluation of the alcohol industry’s DrinkWise consumer information messages to be conducted in 2014 will be used by Australia’s Food and Health Ministers to determine the need for a mandatory scheme, however Mr Thorn warns against any further delay.

“The audit results make it very clear that the alcohol industry isn’t capable of implementing a robust, evidence-based effective alcohol warning label initiative. Any further delays are simply not in the public’s interest,” Mr Thorn said.

Key Findings:

- Of the total sample of 251 products audited in 2013, 92 items (37%) carried any version of the DrinkWise consumer information messages. This compares with 16% in 2012.
- Based on the total sample of products audited in 2013, 35% of beer/cider products, 31% of wine and 43% of spirit/mixed drink products carried any of the DrinkWise consumer information messages.
- There were increases in the proportion of products with DrinkWise messages across all categories. Greater increases were observed for spirit/mixed drinks (from 6% in 2012 to 43% in 2013) and wine (from 10% in 2012 to 31% in 2013) than for beer (from 30% in 2012 to 35% in 2013).
- DrinkWise messages about drinking alcohol in pregnancy were more commonly observed in 2013 than in 2012. In total, 26% of all products audited in 2013 carried a pregnancy-related DrinkWise message (compared with 6% in 2012), with the most commonly observed version being the ‘get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo used in conjunction with the pregnancy silhouette (found on 15% of all products audited in 2013). Other combinations of messages were found on between between 2% and 5% of all products audited in 2013.

Michael Thorn is available for interview (@MichaelTThorn)

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Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, FARE has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE’s website: www.fare.org.au