

Red Bull Gives You Wings..and Possibly a Harp and Halo Too?

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When the school year started, I wrote about my wife's addiction to Diet Mountain Dew and kicking her energy drink habit. I was relieved she got that monkey off her back, as energy drinks have been under fire lately.

Eric Schneiderman, the Attorney General for the State of New York, began an investigation into the almost \$9 billion a year energy drink industry to determine whether consumers are being misled by manufacturer's claims about their products.

The focus of the investigation was to see whether energy drink manufacturers violated federal law by promoting their drinks as dietary supplements rather than as foods, which are more strictly regulated. Investigators also researched to determine if all of the ingredients that are in energy drinks are properly disclosed, as some additives, like black tea extract and guarana, may contain additional caffeine that is not reflected on the beverages' labels.

In addition, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued warning letters in 2010 to Charge Beverages, New Century Brewing, Phusion Projects and United Brands citing a health risk. These companies manufactured energy drinks that combined alcohol and caffeine, a deadly mixture, as the caffeine stimulant causes the consumer to underestimate the negative effects of the alcohol depressant.

In 2011, the American Academy of Pediatrics determined that some energy drinks were harmful to children and young adults because they contain large amounts of caffeine and other stimulants.

The latest blow to the energy drink industry was the recent release of a government study that asserts that energy drinks are "a rising public health problem" that are sending an increasing number of people to emergency rooms.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration conducted the study, using a survey of U.S. hospitals. The survey revealed that the number of emergency room visits linked to energy drinks has doubled in four years — from 10,000 in 2007 to 20,000 in 2011. Almost half of the 20,000 ER visits in 2011 involved mixing energy drinks with another stimulant such as Adderal or Ritalin or with alcohol, while the remaining visits involved consuming energy drinks alone.

The hospital survey reflected that ER admissions were the result of complaints of panic and heart attacks. The stimulants contained in energy drinks can result in irregular heart symptoms or even heart attacks. At the very least, they can increase blood pressure and heart rate, symptoms that can be confused with panic or heart attacks.

The American Beverage Association denounced the study, claiming energy drinks are perfectly safe. The FDA, however, took great interest in the study. A spokesman for the agency said, "We will examine this information to determine whether it can be used to assess whether energy drink products can be legitimately linked to the types of adverse events reported in the ... data." Many congressmen are purportedly calling for an outright ban of energy drinks.

It's a good thing George Clooney isn't an ER doctor anymore, as my wife might start drinking energy drinks again.