



## Texas moves to ban caffeine-infused alcoholic drinks

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Midland Reporter-Telegram |

The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission has joined the three federal agencies in its crusade against caffeine-infused alcoholic beverages, like Four Loko.

The TABC began asking vendors to stop selling the alcoholic products and remove the remaining drinks from store shelves this month. The request followed Food and Drug Administration, Treasury Department and Federal Trade Commission warnings to companies that make the beverages stating that it is unsafe.

But others opposed to government action said the amount of documented injuries or overdoses is a fraction of the overall amount of alcohol-related incidences and that other means to duplicate the feeling are already widely available.

Proponents of the ban, like TABC Administrator Alan Steen argue the brightly packaged, fruit-flavored and cheap canned drinks are marketed toward young consumers. The agency also said it is especially attractive to underage consumers.

"I have visited with members of all segments of the industry and am pleased to announce that I have already received assurances from a significant number that they will voluntarily cooperate with our request," Steen said. "I know that all responsible members of the industry will get on board quickly and act in a manner that safeguards the public's health, safety and welfare."

He said the actions of federal agencies greatly effected the decision to initiate the voluntary effort.

"The FDA reached its conclusion regarding these products after a year-long study of scientific evidence," he said "We felt it was important to act promptly based on the safety concerns the FDA cited."

The University of Texas Medical School also released a study that said the mixture creates "wide-awake drunks," people that are unaware how drunk they are and are capable of drinking more before passing out.

Four Loko contains as much as 12 percent alcohol and about 200 mg of caffeine, which has less alcohol than most wines.

"I would support the TABC's request if the research showed that it does create problems," said City Councilman Jerry Morales.

Morales, also the owner of Gerardo's Casita, said his restaurant doesn't sell the canned drinks and that he's noticed a drastic reduction in the amount of people ordering mixed drinks with caffeine, like vodka and Red Bull.

Lt. Seth Herman with the Midland police said he has not heard any reports from patrol officers directly relating to these types of alcoholic drinks.

"Our stance on this is like any other legal substance that alters someone's perception, a responsible adult probably wouldn't have any issues," said the special investigations lieutenant.

But opponents said these bans will have a very limited effect on the problem of alcohol over-consumption, as they play little role in the issue.

"These types of seemingly magical drinks are not any stronger than other substances readily available to people who want to drink caffeine and alcohol, like a Red Bull and vodka," said Walter Wolson, a senior fellow with the Cato Institute, a non-partisan think-tank in Washington. "This all goes back to the psychological trappings of a long gone prohibitionist era."

He said there wasn't tremendous volumes of caffeine in these drinks to begin with, close to about one cup of coffee.

Wolson said he's aware of the anecdotal stories associated with the new fad popular with younger drinkers and college students but said less than 1 percent of annual trips to the emergency room are because of these types of drinks.

He said it really boils down to a liberty issue.

"It all comes back to the government saying it knows best and that it is just trying to keep us safe from things too tempting," he said. "The FDA is taking this away from adults that know exactly what is in it, not to mention, you can mix other legal products to get the same effect."

The owner of The Bar, Scott Gunn, also said it really is just a responsibility issue. He said that although The Bar does sell mixed caffeine drinks, it doesn't sell the carbonated canned variety.

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