

Request to MLC to Reclassify Alcopops to “Mixed Spirit Drink”

More than 10 million American youth under the age of 21 drink alcohol, over 7 million of them are binge drinkers, and 2.4 million are heavy drinkers.¹ When asked what one type of alcoholic drink they would most prefer to drink, nearly a third of teens (30%) said “alcopops” compared to only 16% for beer and 16% for mixed drinks.²

Alcopops, also known as “malternatives,” “RTDs” (ready to drink), or “FABs” (flavored alcoholic beverages), are sweet, sugary alcoholic beverages that look and taste like lemonade, cola, punch, and tea. Some popular brands are Mike’s Hard Lemonade, Smirnoff Ice, Sky Blue, Captain Morgan Gold, and Bacardi Silver.



Alcopops contain 10% or less of alcohol by volume (usually 5-6%) consisting of distilled spirits that is mixed with nonalcoholic beverages or flavoring or coloring materials. These drinks are usually sold in packages of 4-6 11-12 oz. bottles. Some are now sold individually in larger bottles.

Advertisements for these “starter” drinks make them appealing to young drinkers, particularly girls and young women who do not like the taste of traditional alcohol products.

These drinks do not fit neatly within the traditional alcohol categories of wine, beer, or distilled spirits. Alcohol industry representatives market these products as “malt beverages,” and label them as such. This practice offers alcopops the favorable regulatory position of beer, allowing for much wider availability and lower taxes. This is the current practice in Michigan.

Currently the tax rate for alcopops is \$6.30/31 gallon barrel or about \$.20/gallon. As of January 14, 2009, there were 7,359 retail establishments that could sell alcopops and 3,971 retail establishments that could sell mixed spirit drinks.

Alcopops meet Michigan’s definition of a mixed spirit drink and should be classified as such. The current mixed spirit drink tax rate is \$.48/liter or about \$1.81/gallon. Data from the Center for Science in the Public Interest estimate that if Michigan had been properly classifying alcopops as a mixed spirit drink, an additional \$4.9 million in revenue would have been collected in 2007. This figure factors in less consumption due to the increased price.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health,” 2007.

² Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). “Alcopops: Summary of Findings. What Teens and Adults are Saying about Alcopops.” Poll released May 2001. www.cspinet.org/booze/alcopops_summary.htm.