

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE AND BEST PRACTICE ON ALCOHOL LABELLING

- Alcohol labels improve consumer knowledge and awareness
- The UK has the legal power to introduce mandatory alcohol information labels
- Voluntary labelling schemes have proven ineffective at reaching standards required to inform and protect consumers

ALCOHOL LABELS IMPROVE CONSUMER KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS

International research shows that introducing health information on alcohol products increases consumers' knowledge and awareness of the adverse health impacts of alcohol.^{1,2}

For example, the US introduced health information labels on alcoholic beverages in 1989. These labels improved knowledge about the health risks from alcohol.³ Research also shows that the labels have resulted in more discussion about the dangers of drinking, steadily gained attention, and increased public support for the principle of labelling.⁴

In France, similar results were found after the introduction of a measure in 2006, under the Loi Evin, requiring containers to carry either a health information message or a pictogram advising pregnant women not to drink alcohol. A study of public awareness following this introduction indicated a positive trend in terms of changing the social norm towards 'no alcohol during pregnancy'.⁵

Both France and the US offer examples of positive results after introducing health information labels on alcohol products. However, there is strong reason to believe that these improvements to consumer understanding could still be greater under more effective regulations. Both countries require the same message across all beverages and containers, and mandate relatively small text and pictograms. Yet recent French research recommends improvements in both design and content to achieve a greater effect. Suggested improvements include increased size, favour visual rather than written text, the use of a

¹ Wilkinson, C., & Room, R. (2009). Warnings on alcohol containers and advertisements: international experience and evidence on effects. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 28(4), 426-435.

² Agostinelli, G., & Grube, J. W. (2002). Alcohol counter-advertising and the media. *Alcohol Research & Health*, 26(1), 15-21.

³ Babor et al (2010) *Alcohol No Ordinary Commodity*, Oxford University Press, UK

⁴ Greenfield (1997) in Stockwell T. (2006) *A Review of Research Into The Impacts of Alcohol warning Labels On Attitudes And Behaviour*. University of Victoria, Canada

⁵ Guillemont J. (2009) *Labelling on alcoholic drinks packaging: The French experience*. Presentation to the Committee on National Alcohol Policies and Action (CNAPA) meeting, European Commission, February 2009

coloured font (red) which captures more attention and also use of a set of different messages to target different groups of people.⁶

THE UK HAS THE LEGAL POWER TO INTRODUCE ALCOHOL INFORMATION LABELS

Several countries, including several European Member States, have introduced mandatory health information labels on alcoholic products (see *appendix*). There are therefore no legal obstacles from the European Union or international trade agreements to introducing mandatory labelling in the UK. The communication of the new low risk drinking guidelines provides an excellent opportunity to ensure consumers have the knowledge they are entitled to in order to make informed decisions about their alcohol consumption.




INTRODUCING MANDATORY LABELLING IS NEEDED TO ENSURE CONSUMERS ARE INFORMED AND PROTECTED

In the UK, labelling of alcoholic beverages has been part of the Public Health Responsibility Deal (RD), a voluntary partnership between government and the alcohol industry, launched in 2011. The RD has shown some improvement in labelling. However, recent evaluations show that the compliance in the sector is far from complete and that many products do not carry standard health information.⁷ This research also shows that where labelling has been introduced, it often falls short of best practice in terms of legibility (size, font and background colour). A mandatory system would standardise labels, enforce best practice and ensure full compliance on all drinks.

⁶ Gallopel-Morvan, Karine (2015) *The effectiveness of current French health warning labels displayed on alcohol ads and bottles*, Presentation at the Global Alcohol Policy Conference, October 2015

⁷ Institute of Alcohol Studies (2015) *Dead on Arrival? Evaluating the Public Health Responsibility Deal for Alcohol* <<http://bit.ly/phrdDOA>>


APPENDIX – EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL ALCOHOL LABELLING REGULATIONS

COUNTRY	HEALTH INFORMATION
France	<p>All alcohol products must include health information about alcohol and pregnancy, either as text or pictogram:</p> <p>“Drinking alcoholic beverages during pregnancy even in small quantities can have grave/serious consequences for the health of the baby”.</p> 
Germany	Labels for alcopops must include ‘Not for supply to persons under 18’.
Ireland	Introducing health warning on alcohol products are part of the proposed Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2016.
Mexico	<p>Legally required health information labels on alcohol containers since 2015. Products up to 6.1% needs age information only, drinks between 6.1%-55% needs the three pictograms on age, pregnancy and driving.⁸</p> 
Portugal	Health warning labels legally required on bottles and containers of alcoholic beverages – the implementation is self regulated by the producers.
Slovenia	Foods containing alcohol, should include (on the packaging of the alcoholic beverage) the warning that the product is not suitable for children. The text must be printed in block letters that are clearly visible, legible and be of a colour that is contrasting the background.
South Africa	<p>Legally required health information labels on alcohol containers since 2005. The information shall (i) be visible and not affected by any other matter, (ii) be on a devoted space and at least one eighth of the total size (of ad, container, label or material), (iii) be in black on white background and (iv) alternate seven defined messages given in the regulation.⁹</p> <p>The photo shows both old and revised proposed bigger labels (2015). The revised label is based on the percentages of the size of the container and not the label, as today.¹⁰</p> 

⁸ El Tijuansense (April 2015), ‘Botellas de alcohol tendrán alertas y advertencias sobre su consumo’ <<http://eltijuanense.com/index.php/noticiasg/13-noticias/mexico/8056-botellas-de-alcohol-tendran-alertas-y-advertencias-sobre-su-consumo>>

⁹ Government Gazette (February 2005), ‘Regulations relating to the labelling of alcoholic beverages’, Foodstuffs, cosmetics and disinfectants act, 1972, South Africa <<http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/27236c.pdf>>

¹⁰ Prof Freeman, Department of Health South Africa: presentation at the Global Alcohol Policy Conference 2015

<p>South Korea</p>	<p>Legally required health information labels. Alcohol containers include one of the three following messages:¹¹</p> <p>(a) “Warning: Excessive consumption of alcohol may cause liver cirrhosis or liver cancer and is especially detrimental to the mental and physical health of minors”</p> <p>(b) “Warning: Excessive consumption of alcohol may cause liver cirrhosis or liver cancer and, especially, women who drink while they are pregnant increase the risk of congenital anomalies”</p> <p>(c) “Excessive consumption of alcohol may cause liver cirrhosis or liver cancer, and consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may increase the likelihood of car accidents or accidents during work”</p> <p>On spirits: “Excessive drinking may cause cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer and increase the probability of accidents while driving or working”</p>
<p>USA</p>	<p>Legally required health information labels on alcohol containers since 1989. The label is fixed rather than rotating, and has not changed since its introduction. It is a relatively lengthy message, usually in small print.</p> <p>“GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcohol impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.”</p> 

¹¹ Dr Stockwell T (February 2006), ‘A Review Of Research Into The Impacts Of Alcohol Warning Labels On Attitudes And Behaviour’, Centre for Addictions Research of BC, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada <<http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/report-impacts-alcohol-warning-labels.pdf>>