

ALERT!

Powdered Alcohol



THE Federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau approved the sale of powdered alcohol on March 10, 2015. Lipsmark, the company who wants to market powdered alcohol, calls its product "Palcohol".

News first broke about Palcohol when it was approved for sale in April of 2014. Concerns about its safety quickly escalated among parents, educators, law enforcement, and lawmakers. However, the backlash against Palcohol quickly faded two weeks later when the government pulled its approval of the product, claiming the approval had been given "in error" and cited problems with Palcohol's labeling. Now, almost one year later, it appears those issues have been resolved. Palcohol is back and it is legal to sell it in the United States. Lipsmark says it hopes to have Palcohol ready for distribution and sale as soon as summer 2015.

Powdered alcohol works in about the same way as instant lemonade, tea, cocoa, Tang, Kool-Aid, or any other powdered drink—just add water. Palcohol comes in a one ounce pouch and the instructions say to add the powder to 6 ounces of water or non-alcoholic mixers. When mixed as directed, a drink made from one pouch has about the same alcohol content as a single shot of alcohol. It comes in different varieties such as rum and vodka.

One of the selling points—and potential dangers—of Palcohol is its mobility. A one ounce package of Palcohol is much more portable than alcohol in liquid form. Palcohol's website says that it is ideal for active people such as hikers, bikers and campers. But the ease with which Palcohol packets can be concealed and transported has many people alarmed. Many think that this will make it easier for minors to get away with underage drinking and to sneak alcohol into places where it doesn't belong.

There are also fears that powdered alcohol will fuel binge drinking and lead to more cases of alcohol poisoning—particularly if it is mixed with drinks that already contain alcohol or if it is mixed in higher concentrations than is recommended. It could be very difficult for people to judge the amount of alcohol they are consuming. Critics say this makes Palcohol dangerous.

Adding to the controversy over Palcohol is the likelihood that people will find alternative uses for the product. It can be added to food or perhaps even injected or snorted—which could have serious consequences. When alcohol is snorted it is absorbed very quickly and intoxication occurs immediately. This increases the risk of blackouts and alcohol poisoning. Snorting alcohol can also damage the nasal passages.

Due to health and public safety concerns a few states have already banned powdered alcohol. Other states are considering bans. The makers of Palcohol claim their product has many legitimate and helpful uses—including medical, commercial, and manufacturing applications. There may also be some validity to their arguments (available online) against banning Palcohol.

But the potential risks of powdered alcohol—especially for minors and young adults—must also be taken seriously. For parents, law enforcement, teachers, and teens this should be a topic to watch and stay informed about. ☒

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CCB# 181960

CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

3530 Brady Ct. • Salem, OR
503-581-7131

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