



## Consumer Federation of America

### **What's in Your Drink? TTB Takes a Step towards Alcohol Labeling**

Chris Waldrop

Director, Food Policy Institute

[Food Safety News Op-Ed](#)

June 11, 2013

How many calories are in a bottle of beer? How much alcohol is there in a shot of whiskey? How many serving are in a bottle of wine? Consumers would probably be hard-pressed to know the answers to these questions. Fortunately, that may soon change.

Late last month, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), which has jurisdiction over labeling of alcoholic beverages, took a small, yet positive, step to allow beer, wine and spirits companies to provide consumers with nutrition and alcohol information on their products. In a [May 28<sup>th</sup> ruling](#), TTB said that alcoholic beverage manufacturers can now voluntarily disclose on the label the number of calories and carbohydrates in alcoholic beverages, as well as provide information about alcohol content, such as percent alcohol by volume and fluid ounces of alcohol per serving.

Consumer groups have been advocating for standardized labeling for over a decade so that consumers can be informed about the nutrition and alcohol content of the beer, wine and spirits they choose to drink. Packaged food, dietary supplements and drugs all contain essential information about their contents on the package label. Yet alcoholic beverages have remained the one consumable product without similar “serving facts” information. This is a blind spot for American consumers who could use nutrition and alcohol content information to help moderate their drinking and the calories they consume.

TTB's ruling [comes in the wake](#) of a Federal Trade Commission decision to require the maker of Four Loko, a popular alcoholic beverage that originally included caffeine, to apply to TTB for permission to include an alcohol facts panel on the product. Though this issue has been brewing for years – TTB has yet to finalize rulemaking, initiated in 2007, on the labeling issue.

So while TTB's ruling is a good step, the agency needs to finish the job by finalizing its rule and requiring standardized nutrition and alcohol content information on all alcoholic beverages. A voluntary approach simply won't assure that consumers are provided this important information on all alcoholic beverages they choose to consume. And a standardized serving facts label would help consumers more easily understand the information presented and be able to compare information across products and categories.

Importantly, the label should also include the definition of a “standard drink,” which is 0.6 fluid ounces of alcohol. The 2010 *Dietary Guidelines* and other government publications refer to a standard drink as 12 ounces of regular beer (5% ABV), 5 ounces of wine (12% ABV), and 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (40% ABV), each of which contain 0.6 fluid ounces of alcohol. Knowing how much alcohol is in a

serving of beer, wine or distilled spirits and comparing that to a standard drink can help consumers follow recommendations for moderate drinking.

TTB should keep the momentum going and finalize its rule so that consumers can have the information they need to really know what they're drinking.

*Chris Waldrop is the Director of the Food Policy Institute at Consumer Federation of America where he oversees research and advocacy.*