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Warning labels a must for alcohol

Alcohol Healthwatch fully supports Coroner JP Ryan's call today for all alcohol products to carry health warnings.

Director Rebecca Williams says that the alcohol industry has got away with not informing its consumers of the real risks associated with their products for far too long.

Williams says that labels can be effective in raising awareness of the risks of consuming alcohol. She says that they will be more effective when used in conjunction with measures such as increasing price and restricting the marketing and availability of alcohol in an integrated alcohol harm prevention strategy.

The Australian and New Zealand Governments' have already agreed that alcohol should carry labels warning of the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy. However, rather than acting on this immediately they gave the industry two years to do so voluntarily. A year down the track an independent audit* of 250 products in Australia found that:

- Only 16% carried the industry 'consumer information' messages.
- 98% of the messages took up less than 5% of the label; many were only 1-2% of the label.
- Of products carrying the industry label most (59%) were at the back of the product.
- The labels were inconsistent and lacked uniformity.
- Most labels simply referred consumers to an industry website to "get the facts".

Williams says it is astonishing that a product that causes the premature death of 1000 New Zealanders each year is not required to advise consumers of the risks. What's more astonishing is that the Government actually expects the alcohol industry to do this and do it in a way that is effective. Warning labels on alcohol must be mandatory and designed by health professionals.

For further comment contact Rebecca Williams, Director Alcohol Healthwatch on (09) 520 7035 or 021 862 250

*www.fare.org.au