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Survey sounds strong warning on costs of banning BZP

Illegal drug use and abuse of alcohol will increase if legal party pills are prohibited, according to a survey by respected market research organisation Consumer Link.

Commissioned by the Social Tonics Association of New Zealand, the survey results are available on STANZ website at http://www.stanz.org.nz/STANZ_RESEARCH.pdf

STANZ Chair Matt Bowden said the report was important because it filled a gap in the information the Government had assembled to inform its consideration over whether BZP should be banned.

“Legal party pills are an established part of the New Zealand social scene and you can’t pretend that you can just ban them without generating a reaction. The nature of that reaction should be a key factor in the Government’s decision-making yet the Government has not even tried to evaluate the likely behavioural response.

“The Consumer Link work does this and should sound an important warning to Associate Health Minister Jim Anderton and to all MPs,” he said.

Consumer Link interviewed 200 New Zealanders aged between 18 and 29. Of the respondents 89 per cent drank alcohol, 41 per cent had used legal party pills and 54 per cent had used illegal drugs. This profile is consistent with the results of a Massey University study last year.

Key findings are:

- **Legal party pills are not a route to harder drugs:** Of those surveyed who used illegal drugs, 95.6 per cent answered “no” when asked if legal party pills had been a gateway.
- **Legal party pills tend to reduce rather than promote other drug and alcohol use:** Among the legal party pill users, a net 10.3 per cent reported taking less or no illegal drugs as a result and a net 9.8 per cent less or no alcohol.
- **Banning legal party pills will lead to higher alcohol and illegal drug use:** A net 30.5 per cent of party pill users believe that consumption of alcohol will increase and a net 50 per cent that illegal drug use will increase if BZP is banned. *To get an idea of how much more traffic this may generate for the illegal drug market, it should be remembered that 50,000 legal party pills are sold in New Zealand each week.
- **The adverse effects from legal party pills are far less severe than for alcohol:** Of the sample subset who had used both; 81.7 per cent reported



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suffering headaches as a result of alcohol consumption compared to 29.3 per cent from legal party pills while for vomiting the incidence was 74.4 per cent and 17.1 per cent respectively; memory loss; 59.8 per cent and 8.5 per cent; physical injury, 45 per cent and 7 per cent and aggression toward others, 28 per cent and 1.2 per cent.

- **Legal party pills are non-addictive and much easier to control:** 27.5 per cent of alcohol users described their drinking as either sometimes, often or always out of control and 18 per cent thought it would be “quite difficult” to quit, 7.3 per cent “very difficult” and 2.2 per cent “impossible”. The corresponding figures for legal party pill users were 3.6 per cent and 1.2 per cent. No-one thought giving up would be either “very difficult” or “impossible.”

“Somebody had to do this sort of quantitative research if the Government was going to be in the position to make an informed decision, and we have done it.

“The results are overwhelming and reinforce STANZ’ strongly held view that tougher regulation is the answer rather than prohibition or even the status quo, where the restrictions on the sale of party pills are few and where the consumer is provided with little protection under the law.

“STANZ has paid professional public lawyers to draft a comprehensive set of regulations supported by a detailed code of manufacturing practice. For the Government to ignore this work, and the findings of the Consumer Link survey, would be irresponsible in the extreme,” Matt Bowden said.

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