

## Why Energy Drinks Could Be More Dangerous Than You Think

BY TARA CULP-RESSLER NOVEMBER 15, 2012

*"Why Popular Energy Drinks Could Be More Dangerous Than You Think"*



Americans who consume popular energy drinks like Monster could be taking in unsafe levels of caffeine, new reports from the Food and Drug Administration suggest. The federal agency confirmed yesterday that it has received reports of 13 deaths over the past four years that cite the 5-Hour Energy drink as a possible cause — and that's on top of previous reports that say Monster may have contributed to five deaths over the past three years.

Although the FDA's incident reports don't provide conclusive scientific evidence for the cause of death, The New York Times reports that the agency has documented multiple links between energy drinks and American deaths:

Since 2009, 5-Hour Energy has been mentioned in some 90 filings with the F.D.A., **including more than 30 that involved serious or life-threatening injuries like heart attacks, convulsions and, in one case, a spontaneous abortion**, a summary of F.D.A. records reviewed by The New York Times showed. [...]

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**The number of reports filed with the F.D.A. that mentions 5-Hour Energy appears particularly striking.** In 2010, for example, the F.D.A. received a total of 17 fatality reports that mentioned a dietary supplement or a weight loss product, two broad categories that cover more than 50,000 products, according to Mr. Fabricant, the F.D.A. official. [...]

Another federal agency, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, **reported late last year that more than 13,000 emergency room visits in 2009 were associated with energy drinks alone.**

Energy drinks, which are especially popular among young people, represent the fastest-growing segment of the soft drink industry, with sales totaling around \$9 billion. But energy drink companies are currently able to sidestep some FDA regulatory guidelines by marketing their products as “drinks” or “dietary supplements.” Companies that classify their products as drinks do not have to report to the FDA, and they don’t have to disclose how much caffeine is their products.

And since reporting caffeine levels remains optional, many energy drink companies choose to forgo it — or in some cases, even falsely advertise it to downplay how much caffeine is really in their beverages. According to Consumer Reports, 11 of the country’s 27 top-selling energy drinks don’t specify the amount of caffeine in their products, and five of the 16 drinks that did list their caffeine amount actually contained more caffeine per serving than their labels claimed.

The FDA says it doesn’t currently have enough scientific information to change its regulatory practices over the energy drink industry, although some lawmakers are pressuring the agency to look into the issue further. Last month, Sens. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) asked the FDA to investigate the effect that energy drinks’ caffeine levels could have on children and adolescents. And in July, New York’s Attorney General issued subpoenas to three energy drink companies to obtain more information on the their marketing practices.