

## Low-alcohol beer satisfies students

### No difference noted to regular-strength beer in UVic student tastings

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VICTORIA - Male students at the University of Victoria subjected to a taste test of their favourite frothy beverage couldn't tell the difference between low-alcohol and regular-strength beer, a new study released Monday said.

The findings from the UVic-based Centre for Addictions Research B.C. study are being used by researchers and health experts next week to appeal to the B.C. government to tie liquor prices to alcohol content.

The idea is that if low-alcohol beverages were cheaper -- and high-alcohol drinks more expensive, resulting in a neutral impact on provincial coffers -- consumer tastes would change toward less potent beverages.

"We are very optimistic," said Tim Stockwell, director of CARBC and co-leader of the study. "There's a huge potential here we are not realizing. They can do it at a stroke of the pen with no cost . . . and it will reduce death and injury and illness."

Finance Minister Carole Taylor said the tax proposal is one of more than 5,000 budget recommendations she is reviewing .

"I'm open to look at it," Taylor said. However, she noted what seems like a logical tax from a community or health perspective is "extremely complicated" to write into tax legislation policy.

For instance, if you tax junk food related to a food's high sugar or fat content, how do account for good sugars and fats, she said. And higher taxes on legal cigarettes can boost black market sales and aggravate the problem. "In fairness, we'll look at all ideas . . ."

B.C.'s health officer will argue while alcohol is harmless to most people and even brings cardiac benefits to some, it is also a habit-forming depressant and carcinogen that has led to increases in some cancers, birth defects, vehicle accidents, and acts of violence.

"We could reduce burdens to the overburdened health and justice system, improve community safety and be a source of revenue for much needed treatment and prevention services," Dr. Perry Kendall said.

The CARBC study conducted between August and October 2006 compared Spinnakers Doc Hadfield ale at 3.8 per cent and the Labatt's brand Kokanee Gold at 5.3 per cent. Results revealed that 34 participants in two different pub-style drinking sessions equally enjoyed the experience produced by the two beers, CARBC research assistant Dave Segal said.



CREDIT: Ray Smith, CanWest News Service  
Centre for Addictions Research B.C. assistant David Segal holds glasses of Spinnakers Doc Hadfield ale and Kokanee Gold.

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