



Equalization: A Drink is Not a Drink

The Myth of a Standard Drink



For more than 200 years, U.S. policymakers have recognized the significant differences between beer and hard liquor, and that laws and regulations governing the two should be different. The false notion that “a drink is a drink” is easily dispelled with a careful look at the facts.

The differences between beer and hard liquor include their alcohol concentration, the way each is produced and consumed, and the level of positive social involvement of each in local communities.



- Beer has a much lower alcohol concentration than hard liquor. Not all alcohol drinks are equal. A standard Scotch on the rocks is equal to 1.5 beers, while a Long Island Iced Tea contains as much alcohol as five beers. Another way to look at this is that a gallon of beer is less than a 12-pack, whereas a gallon of hard liquor is the equivalent of more than 85 beers.
- Not only is the alcohol content of a beer “fixed,” so is the typical package size, giving consumers greater control and more opportunity to drink responsibly. When a consumer buys a 12 oz. bottle or can of beer, that alcohol amount is set. On the other hand, hard liquor is a concentrated product, meaning the alcohol content of drinks can vary depending on how much liquor is mixed and who is mixing it.
 - The most common way to consume hard liquor, through mixed drinks, results in the widest variation in alcohol content among alcohol beverages.
 - The 1.5 oz. “standard serving” of hard liquor is unrealistic; the average pure alcohol content of many popular drinks is more than 70 percent higher than the mythical ‘standard serving.’ A cursory Internet search of popular liquor websites finds mixed-drink recipes calling for more than 4 oz. of hard liquor in a single serving – three times the so-called “standard serving.”
- Hard liquor is more intoxicating than beer. Medical studies demonstrate hard liquor produces higher blood alcohol content (BAC) levels, more quickly, than the same amount of alcohol from beer. For instance, 2-3 glasses of beer over 2 hours results in less alcohol consumed and absorbed than 2-3 glasses of a cocktail mixed with hard liquor.

Given these simple facts, suggestions that a mixed drink such as a 4 oz. martini made of 80-proof hard liquor is “the same” as a glass of beer with 4.6 Alcohol By Volume can be easily dismissed as untrue. There are major differences between beer, wine and hard liquor — both in what they are made of and how they are used — and they deserve separate tax and regulatory treatment.

Beer is the moderate choice. Beer is made of wholesome ingredients, such as barley, hops, yeast and local water. Beer is the right choice.

