

Wisconsin Considers Strong Liquor Ban

SCOTT BAUER, Associated Press



This Dec. 30, 2013 photo shows bottles of Everclear, 190 Proof grain alcohol, for sale at a grocery store in Madison, Wis. A bill in the state Assembly would ban the sale of 190-proof alcohol like Everclear, out of concerns about its potency. (AP Photo/Scott Bauer)

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Jeff Wielichowski drowned in his family's pool two summers ago after drinking a mix of Gatorade, Red Bull and Everclear with some friends.

At 190 proof, or 95 percent alcohol, Everclear packs more than twice the punch of the best-selling brands of whiskey, vodka and gin. And at about \$18 per bottle, it has long been a popular ingredient in boozy punches served at parties in and around college campuses.

That may change soon in Wisconsin, where Wielichowski's mother, Luanne Wielichowski, has channeled her grief into pushing state lawmakers to ban the sale of high-potent liquors like Everclear. A bill that would ban the sale of alcohol that's 190-proof or higher is gathering bipartisan support in the Legislature and could be voted on early next year.

Luanne Wielichowski said she's hopeful the bill could be passed in 2014.

"God I hope so. I really, really hope so," she said. "My son's not coming back. This is for some other kid that hopefully won't die because they had this lethal concoction in their body."

Changes to liquor laws are a tough sell in booze-friendly Wisconsin, which has the third-lowest tax on beer nationwide and a strong alcohol lobby. While support is

Wisconsin Considers Strong Liquor Ban

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

building for the ban, at least one powerful group is aiming to stop it.

The Wisconsin Grocers Association will likely oppose the bill out of concerns that it would open the door to other products being banned, said the group's president Brandon Scholz.

"While we are concerned about the few incidences of irresponsible use of this product, we have much greater concerns about the slippery slope that is created with the ban of this product," Scholz said. "What's next? Ban all alcohol products? Beer and wine as well?"

The influential Tavern League, which represents Wisconsin's bar owners, isn't taking a position on the bill, said lobbyist Scott Stenger.

The Wisconsin Wine and Spirit Institute, which represents liquor wholesalers in the state, has not discussed the proposal, said Joel Frank, the group's lobbyist. Frank is also president of Frank Beverage Group, a liquor wholesaler that distributes in Madison and southwestern Wisconsin. He said sales of high-alcohol content liquors like Everclear are minuscule.

"There would be no economic side effects" if the bill passed, Frank said.

The CEO of Luxco, the St. Louis-based company that makes Everclear, declined to comment on the bill.

"We leave it up to the legislature within the state to reach its own conclusions on what might or might not be in the best interests of its citizens," said company chairman and CEO Donn Lux in an email.

Fifteen other states, including Minnesota, Michigan and Iowa, already ban high-potent liquors.

Everclear is sold at both 151 proof, or roughly 75 percent alcohol content, and 190 proof, or 95 percent alcohol content. Most popular hard liquors like gin, vodka, and brandy are sold at around 80 proof, or 40 percent alcohol.

Because of its high alcohol content, Everclear is most frequently used as an ingredient in cocktails or punches.

"It has no taste. Its only purpose is to impair people quickly," said Julia Sherman, coordinator of the Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project at the University of Wisconsin Law School. "We don't need it on the shelves."

Rep. André Jacque, R-De Pere, is sponsoring the bill in the Assembly. He's working with Rep. Terese Berceau, D-Madison, who circulated an earlier version after being contacted by Wielichowski.

"It's essentially a poison," Jacque said of Everclear. "This stuff will mess you up really bad."

Wisconsin Considers Strong Liquor Ban

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

Jacque said he was concerned about young people such as college students and those with less drinking experience being caught off-guard by the potency of Everclear masked by juices or other ingredients.

"It can certainly be very destructive very quickly," Jacque said.

Frank, the liquor wholesaler, said he understands why some would support a ban, but he said there are also some cocktail recipes that rely on 190 proof alcohol.

"There are legitimate purposes for the product besides what you and I would conceive of as the social ills," Frank said.

Everclear is described on Luxco's website as having "tremendous brand recognition and a loyal, near cult-status, following."

Luanne Wielichowski said she hopes that through her efforts, she will help keep other parents from going through the grief she's endured since her son died.

"My life is pretty much been in pain ever since," she said.

Source URL (retrieved on 05/04/2015 - 5:04am):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/01/wisconsin-considers-strong-liquor-ban>