

Calif. Bill Would Mandate Health Warnings on Sugary Drinks

DON THOMPSON, Associated Press



California would become the first state to require warning labels on the front of sodas and other sugary drinks under proposed legislation announced in Sacramento, Calif., Thursday, Feb. 13, 2014. A bill SB1000, by Sen. William Monning D-Carmel, would require manufacturers to place warnings on beverage containers that have added sweeteners that have 75 or more calories in every 12 ounces. The beverage industry notes that drink containers list the number of calories on the label. **(AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California would become the first state to require warning labels on sodas and other [sugary drinks](#) [1] under a proposal a state lawmaker announced Thursday.

SB1000 would require the warning on the front of all beverage containers with added sweeteners that have 75 or more calories in every 12 ounces. The label would read: "STATE OF CALIFORNIA SAFETY WARNING: Drinking beverages with added sugar(s) contributes to obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay."

Democratic Sen. William Monning, who proposed the bill, said there is overwhelming research showing the link between sugary drinks and those health problems, adding that the wording was developed by a national panel of nutrition

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and public health experts. The bill has the backing of the California Medical Association and the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

"The goal of the warning quite simply is to give consumers the right to know what are well-established medical impacts from consuming these beverages," Monning, from Carmel, said in a telephone interview. "We're talking about a public health epidemic that will take more lives than gun violence."

The Latino Coalition for a Healthy California and the California Black Health Network also are sponsoring the legislation, citing the heavy consumption of sugary drinks and associated health problems among minorities.

[A bill similar to Monning's was introduced last year in Vermont](#) [2], but it has been held in the Committee on Human Services since April. The Vermont bill would require manufacturers to put warning labels on beverages that contain sugar or other artificial additives.

CalBev, the California arm of the Washington, D.C.-based American Beverage Association, noted that the industry already posts calorie counts on the front of many beverage containers as part of its "Clear on Calories" campaign that began in 2010. Also, drink bottles already have detailed ingredient lists and nutritional information.

"We agree that obesity is a serious and complex issue," the group said in a statement, but it called Monning's bill "misleading" because it said just 6 percent of calories in the average American's diet come from soda, fruit, sports and energy drinks, compared with 11 percent in sweets and deserts. Moreover, it said most calories are consumed in the form of fats, oils and starches in food.

The group would not put a price tag on complying with the proposed legislation but said the measure would increase the cost of doing business in California.

The medical groups backing Monning's bill countered with their own data, saying sugary drinks are the largest source of added calories in American's diet in the last three decades. They also said one soda a day boosts an adult's chances of being overweight by 27 percent and a child's by 55 percent, and it can increase the risk of diabetes by 26 percent.

Monning equated the warning labels to similar efforts to control alcohol and tobacco and dismissed suggestions that the labeling would be another example of nanny government.

"It is not the responsibility of industry to protect the public health. It is the responsibility of government," he said, noting that consumers could still choose to drink the beverages. "We believe it's an appropriate role for government to play."

The warning labels would mesh, he said, with health campaigns and proposed ordinances in several California cities and elsewhere to discourage sugar consumption. San Francisco, for instance, is considering asking voters to approve a

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tax on soda and other sweetened drinks, while former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg unsuccessfully pushed proposals to tax soda and ban the sale of large soda containers.

Monning said warning labels can make a difference in consumers' choices, particularly when paired with other public health campaigns warning of the dangers of obesity.

"We don't underestimate what we're up against," he said. "We're up against \$100 million advertising campaigns."

He said the labeling would be consistent with the industry's own stated goal of providing consumers with the information to make an intelligent choice.

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