

ALCOHOL WARNING LABELS

WHEN

On August 1, 1991, the Yukon Liquor Corporation began placing warning labels on all wine, spirit and packaged liquor products to warn the public of the potential risks of drinking while pregnant.

WHAT:

The self-adhesive labels measure 1 3/8 x 7/8 inches. The original label was bright yellow with black lettering and read: “WARNING, DRINKING ALCOHOL DURING PREGNANCY CAN CAUSE BIRTH DEFECTS.” In 1998 the colour was changed to fluorescent pink and then in 2003 to the current fluorescent orange and the French translation of the message: “AVERTISSEMENT, LA CONSOMMATION D’ALCOOL DURANT LA GROSSESSE PEUT PROVOQUER DES ANOMALIES CHEZ LE FOETUS” was added.

WHY:

The program was initiated in response to public concerns raised about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects. The government’s decision to begin labeling all alcohol products came after an intense lobbying effort and a growing awareness of the danger of drinking while pregnant. It was determined the warning labels would help bring the problems of FAS/FAE to the forefront and increase awareness among pregnant women. The initiative was not the consequence of specific legislation, however it was presented and discussed in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

SUPPORT FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS:

In June, 1991, The Yukon Liquor Corporation put forward a proposal asking the Canadian Association of Liquor Jurisdictions to support a resolution forcing producers to put warning labels on all bottles sold in Canada. Although the resolution did not receive overwhelming support, it did stimulate significant conversation and debate amongst the delegates.

FEEDBACK:

Initially there was some public reaction to the labeling, the majority of it tended to be either favourable or neutral. Margaret Joe, the then Minister Responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation received several communications from outside agencies voicing strong support for the labeling program.

EFFECTIVENESS:

The effectiveness of alcohol labeling is very difficult to determine. There have been no studies done which looked directly at the impact of labeling. The results of the Yukon Health Promotion Survey in 1994 indicated that 90% of the respondents were aware of the risks of drinking while pregnant.

