

Monsieur Jean Todt

President
Federation Internationale de l'Automobile
8 place de la Concorde
75008 Paris

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OPEN LETTER RE: Alcohol Advertising in Formula One: An Irresponsible Message

I am writing to you on behalf of the European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare), an alliance of 57 public health organisations from 25 European countries working on the prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm. Improving road safety is one of the topics we are promoting. Drink driving is linked to 25% of the road deaths in Europe and 6,500 deaths could be saved in 2010 if drivers had obeyed the law on drink drivingⁱ.

The reason why we are writing to you is to address our great concern regarding alcohol sponsorship of Formula One. On the 9th November the **2014 Brazilian Grand Prix** was broadcasted widely on several TV channels in Europe and the alcohol advertising through sponsorship was very visible during the whole day. 2014 has been a strong season for alcohol sponsorship in Formula One. The alcohol producer Smirnoffⁱⁱ now joins Johnny Walker (McLaren)ⁱⁱⁱ and Martini (Williams)^{iv} as another major alcohol brand in the sport after signing the sponsorship agreement with Force India (May 2014).

The European Alcohol Policy Alliance is deeply concerned of the heavy marketing exercise seen in Formula One and is therefore requesting an urgent change. The association between drinking and driving should clearly be seen as a troubling one.

Alcohol sponsorship is big business in Europe. The alcohol industry spends billions every year marketing its products, and over £800 million a year in the UK alone.^v However, the very nature of such sponsorship in Formula One is leaving an uneasy feeling for an increasing number of people.

Sponsorship of sporting events such as Formula One is a prominent marketing tool used by the alcohol industry to promote their products. Sponsorship of this type operates differently from conventional advertising, as its means of persuasion is indirect and implicit. It allows companies not only to create and reinforce awareness, but also to generate positive associations between the sport and the product. The intended result is that the sponsorship creates a link between the company and a highly valued event or occasion in the minds of consumers; a process known as "brand transfer." It is this transfer that is particularly troubling.

Allowing alcohol sponsorship in Formula One seems to contradict many official guidelines for the marketing of alcohol. It runs against the EU Directive (2010/13/EU) which states that marketing for the consumption of alcohol should not be linked to driving. Moreover, the current association between alcohol and driving does not seem to fall in the category of "the widespread promotion of responsible drinking messages", part of the mission supported by the alcohol industry itself.



Alcohol companies often claim that their campaigns are merely the result of a competition between producers for market share and brand loyalty. However a ban on Formula One alcohol sponsorship would only create a level playing field for those in the industry. There is wide spread agreement about the inappropriateness of the alcohol industry sponsoring Formula One.

A common argument made against imposing restrictions on alcohol sponsorships is that it could deal a significant financial blow to the sport. Yet such concerns are largely unjustified. When the tobacco industry was edged out of snooker, horse racing and even Formula One itself, the sports made successful shifts and alternative sponsors emerged. Despite fear-mongering concerning the withdrawal of tobacco sponsorship from Formula One, claiming that the new regulations could be fatal for the sport, nothing of the sort has emerged.

When considering the continued destructive prevalence of drink-driving, permitting the mixed messages presented in alcohol sponsorship of Formula One seems ever more inappropriate given the total viewing audience of 500 million. The sport would not collapse overnight as a result and would constitute a sincere effort to sever the link between drinking and driving. Furthermore, a ban on alcohol sponsorship in Formula One is not a radical departure from previous policy, and rather is a reform in sync with current national efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm.

The European Alcohol Policy Alliance is requesting an end to alcohol sponsorship in Formula One and expects rapid action from your side. We are happy to meet to discuss this further with you.

Sincerely,

Mariann Skar
Secretary General
European Alcohol Policy Alliance

Copy:

Chief Executive Bernard Ecclestone, Formula One
Vice President Andrus Ansip, European Commission Digital Agenda
Director General Robert Madelin, European Commission DG Connect
Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis , European Commission Health and Food Safety
Director General Ladislav Miko, European Commission DG Sanco
Director General Margaret Chan, World Health Organisation
Head of Unit Vladimir B Poznyak, World Health Organisation

ⁱ ETSC (2012): Drink Driving: Towards Zero Tolerance

ⁱⁱ <http://www.forceindiaf1.com/partners>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.mclaren.com/formula1/partners/Johnnie-Walker>

^{iv} <http://www.williamsf1.com/Team/AboutUs/Our-Partners/Martini/>

^v Gordon, R. and Harris, F. (2009) Critical social marketing: Assessing the impact of alcohol marketing on youth drinking, International Journal of Non Profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 15(3), pp265-275

