

Mixed emotions

Mixed drink sales may have taken a dive since the Government's controversial tax increase, but has it done anything to curb teenage binge drinking? GILBERT GARDINER investigates.

LEGISLATION to increase taxes on ready-to-drink alcohol mixers may have slowed liquor store sales but not teenage binge drinking.

Cellarbrations Berwick manager Sunny Singh says his business has experienced a noticeable downturn in mixed-drink sales.

"Spirit sales have almost doubled in the past month, our bottled soft drink has increased too.

"Customers are looking for alternatives such as bottled spirits and beer," he says.

The Federal Government has legislated a 70 per cent excise increase on pre-mixed drinks.

The tax hike is forecast to earn the Government more than \$3 billion, of which \$53 million would go towards a national strategy to tackle binge drinking.

LaTrobe Liberal MP Jason Wood says the move is nothing more than a "tax grab" and won't do anything to curb binge drinking.

"The ones feeling the pinch are those

in their 30s and 40s who are accustomed to buying mixed drinks after work," he says.

"If the Government directs most of the money raised to crime prevention, youth programs, education and preventative measures across the board

'The ones feeling the pinch are those in their 30s and 40s who are accustomed to buying mixed drinks after work.'

I would support it, but it doesn't, it goes into government revenue.

"The ones it's meant to target will go into shops and find alternatives."

Holt Labor MP Anthony Byrne is tight-lipped on the issue, saying only that he believes the tax is the first step towards combating teenage binge drinking.

The issue of binge drinking was brought to light in January this year when now celebrity-of-sorts party boy Corey Worthington hosted a house party in Narre Warren which



attracted more than 500 people.

At the same time police across the south-east were faced with out-of-control parties on a weekly basis.

Acting Senior Sergeant Robert Madeley of Narre Warren police says one way to deter unacceptable behaviour is to register parties with police.

"People that register their parties tend to be responsible and are rarely a problem," he says.

"Knowing about these parties allows us to focus on serious collisions and domestic disputes which are problem in Casey."

U-NOME Security specialises in a personalised approach to event security using only women.

Managing director and former

policewoman of 12 years Naomi Oakley says the advantage of having a female presence is employing communication and negotiation skills as opposed to brute force.

Oakley has responded to hundreds of out-of-control parties involving gatecrashers, under-age drinking, scuffles and noise complaints.

"Protecting teenagers with security staff and stringent crowd control measures is important because underage parties are a time bomb ready to explode," Ms Oakley says.

"Young adults prefer to drink things that look great, that are convenient to carry and that are trendy."

As the night progresses and friends start mixing each others' drinks the alcohol to mix ratio increases, which eventually means a "legless finish".



Top: A fall in sales of alcopops has been felt following a marked increase in taxes on pre-mixed drinks. Above: Crowd controller Naomi Oakley has responded to hundreds of out-of-control parties which involved underage drinking. Picture: Wayne Hawkins

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