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E-paper

FSSAI to issue pictorial warnings on alcohol bottles after HC decision

Mumbai: To prevent the loss of lives due to drunken driving, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will formulate new standards to issue pictorial warnings on liquor bottles following a decision by the Delhi High Court in favour of Prince Singhal, founder, Community Against Drunken Driving (CADD), who filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL).

The suggested pictorial warning states, “Alcohol consumption is injurious to health. Drinking and driving may lead to accidents and death. Don’t drink and drive.”

Singhal didn’t only seek pictorial warnings, but also stated that they be accompanied by clear and direct warnings to consumers about the perils of driving under the influence of alcohol on every bottle of Indian or Indian-made Foreign Liquor (IMFL).

The court ordered the country’s apex food regulator, which falls under the health and family welfare ministry, to do the needful.

Singhal stated, “As per the directions of the High Court, I met FSSAI officials, and as required by them, have submitted four designs, along with the messages to be used on the bottle label.”

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“Pictorial warnings are understood easily without any language barrier. Moreover, they are comprehensible by persons belonging to any section of society, including those who either cannot read or write, or are not aware of a particular language,” he added.

Singhal stated, “Not only would pictorial messages serve as an alert or reminder to road users about the hazards of drunk driving, but they will also help in reducing the risk of road accidents.” “India loses over 1,46,000 lives every year, out of which 1,00,000 are due to drunk driving. Drunk driving is also responsible for over 72 per cent of fatal road accidents,” he informed.

“Indian roads continue to be among the deadliest in the world. Seventeen people are killed every hour, one person dies every 3.5 minutes and at least 400 in a day,” Singhal said.

He added, “Countries which brought down their drunk driving accidents and fatalities by introducing of such warnings include the United States, Kenya, South Africa, Thailand, Zimbabwe, Taiwan, Mexico, Turkey and others.”

Officials’ views:

Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, informed, “Such warnings are in place, and the state excise departments are trying to implement them.” “There was a petition filed by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the High Court, and we were directed to look into the matter,” he added.

“After hearing the NGO’s views, we found this would be a good initiative,” Agarwal said. “Pictorial warnings, if needed, should be there. But this is in a very initial stage,” he added. “We are looking into the global best practices and the work done by some NGOs in this direction. We would also consult the industry before taking a final decision into the matter,” Agarwal said.

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An official from Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Maharashtra, said, "It is very good that people taking such initiatives." "As per my view, the move will help to tackle this problem by five to six per cent," he added. "As the consumer of the liquor is a citizen of society who has attained adulthood, he/she is aware of the consequences of alcohol consumption," the official said. "It is an issue of our own morals, whether we want to drink alcohol or not. The society needs to be educated regarding such issues," he added.