

So-called low-risk drinking isn't

Researchers find 2,800 premature deaths vs. more than 800 prevented

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VICTORIA - Like any drunken tale too good to be true, it turns out the supposed health benefits of low-risk drinking have been greatly exaggerated, says a Victoria researcher in an international report released Monday.

"We need to be careful about our drinking and the idea that alcohol is really a health product," said Tim Stockwell, director of the Centre for Addictions Research of B.C.

Focusing their findings on Canadian statistics, researchers found that while more than 800 premature deaths were prevented each year due to the benefits of moderate drinking, that same type of consumption caused 2,800 premature deaths.

That means a net of 2,000 people die of so-called low-risk drinking annually in Canada, Stockwell said. Add to that 5,300 deaths a year due to high-risk drinking and it turns out more than 7,000 people die prematurely each year due to the ill-effects of alcohol use.

Those deaths include such things as motor vehicle accidents, alcohol-related cancers and liver disease.

Low-risk drinking is defined by researchers as no more than an average of two standard drinks for women, three for men.

A Canadian standard drink is 12 ounces of beer, 1 1/2 ounces of liquor or five ounces of wine.

Countless major peer-reviewed studies heralded the benefits of low-risk drinking.

The report entitled Alcohol-Caused Mortality in Australia and Canada: Scenario Analyses Using Different Assumptions About Cardiac Benefit is published in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs and can be found at www.jsad.com.

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