

## INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ALCOHOL POLICIES

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **“REASONABLE RISK” OFFERS INSIGHT INTO HOW WE WEIGH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION**

##### ***New Book Shows How Risks of Drinking, Not Wearing Seatbelts and Breathing Polluted Air Are All Part of the Panoply of Risks that Individuals Face Daily***

WASHINGTON, D.C., [Date] – Examining the aura of risk surrounding alcohol consumption, a new book concludes that the risks inherent in drinking have some striking similarities with risks people also willingly encounter in various other activities.

The book, “Reasonable Risk: Alcohol in Perspective,” is part of a series on alcohol and society by the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP). It examines how societies and cultures view the panoply of potential hazards that are commonplace in everyday life for millions of people – from riding without a seatbelt to engaging in unprotected sex to drinking – and how individuals and groups weigh these risks and manage them.

“We regard some risks as insignificant and worth taking, but may see others as daunting and not worth the potential cost,” said Marcus Grant, president of ICAP. “How we respond to risk as individuals may also be quite different from how we respond at the societal level.” This new book explores alcohol consumption in the broader context of general risks, he said, adding that alcohol is part of the fabric of many cultures and societies.

Published by Brunner-Routledge, “Reasonable Risk” was written by Marjana Martinic, Ph.D., Vice President for Public Health at ICAP, and Barbara Leigh, Ph.D., M.P.H., Senior Scientist at the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute of the University of Washington, Seattle.

For much of the world, drinking is a socially acceptable, risk-worthy activity. “Alcohol has been an integral part of many cultures around the world for thousands of years,” the book states, “– as elixir, palliative, food, medicine, intoxicant, social lubricant, and ritual aid. Most people who drink are motivated largely by the prospect that they will enjoy it. For some, drinking provides an outlet, offers pleasure, and even provides benefit within a healthy lifestyle. For others, alcohol consumption can represent considerable risk to health and well-being.”

Across cultures, “normal” drinking can vary considerably. In Greece and Spain, for example, there is generally little concern about alcohol consumed with meals. “In India

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and the U.S., on the other hand, where drinking and eating are not well-integrated activities, this may not be considered an acceptable concept of ‘normal’ drinking,” the authors said.

Communicating risk information is often colored by hidden agendas, particularly when it comes to alcohol, because people have strong opinions about alcohol and its place in society. “For some, consuming alcohol is unacceptable, morally wrong, dangerous, and to be avoided at all costs. For others, it is one of life’s pleasures, to be enjoyed in moderation, much like fine food or good music. For still others, alcohol dependence and a history of alcohol abuse represent a constant intense personal battle.”

How we react to information about risk depends on how it is packaged, the authors point out. We react strongly when we learn alcohol abuse and reckless drinking lead to traffic accidents, serious injuries and death. On the other hand, we may not react as strongly to the less immediate risks of alcohol abuse, such as the well known risk of developing liver cirrhosis due to heavy drinking.

Good risk communication offers a balanced and representative view of the current state of knowledge about a topic. When presented properly, this information can alter perceptions and change behavior. A TV campaign on the risks of drunk driving in the U.K. during the 70s, for example, significantly changed attitudes, ultimately being associated with a 50% drop in drunk-driving fatalities.

The book offers the “educated layman” a lucid explanation of risk, particularly those involving drinking patterns, supported by scientific evidence, and was submitted for peer review prior to publication.

“The risks we face have a hierarchy,” Dr. Martinic explained. “Some are life threatening, while others are just an inconvenience. If we are to manage risks effectively, we have to know how they fit into the overall scheme of things and why they concern us in the way they do.”

Established in 1995 to promote global public/private partnerships in the area of alcohol policy, ICAP is supported by 10 major international beverage companies that aid the not-for-profit organization to bridge the industry-public health policy gap. ICAP is dedicated to promoting understanding of the role of alcohol in society and helping reduce the abuse of alcohol worldwide through dialogue and partnerships involving the beverage industry, the public health community and others interested in alcohol policy.

*The Executive Summary for this book can be found at: [http://www.icap.org/publications/exsm\\_risk.html](http://www.icap.org/publications/exsm_risk.html)*

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