



## Clarifications on Copper Cups, the Roles of the Iowa ABD and DIA, and Keeping a Little Perspective

**(August 4, 2017) West Des Moines, Iowa** - Over the past week, the Iowa Restaurant Association has received a number of questions about the use of copper cups in serving of Moscow Mules and other summer beverages. Much of the confusion has stemmed from a recent [Advisory Bulletin](#) issued by the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division about the use of copper mugs. The Iowa Restaurant Association has been in contact with both the ABD and the Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA) on the issue.

According to the ABD, this bulletin was issued after a licensee was advised by DIA that the mugs it was using did not meet federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) food safety standards. Because licensees/permittees who serve alcoholic beverages must comply with applicable federal and state food safety regulations, the ABD decided to issue an advisory bulletin last week.

To clarify, the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division does not inspect or issue citations over copper mugs or cups. An establishment cannot lose their liquor license simply because they have copper mugs or cups. An ABD investigator, like any patron, can refer an establishment to the Department of Inspections and Appeals if they are concerned about a food code violation -- in this case unlined copper cups -- but that is the limit of the Division's authority in this situation.

In conferring with the Department of Inspections and Appeals, the organization that oversees all of the state's food inspectors and inspections, the use of copper cups or mugs for drinks in establishments across the state is not a major concern. This regulation has been in the FDA Food Code since 1976. Because it is a 40+ year old code, most copper cups and mugs sold in the United States are already lined with tin, stainless steel, or a lacquer -- all of which are perfectly safe to drink from at any temperature. This interior lining prevents chemical reactions between copper and the ingredients of the drink and also prevents copper from leaking into a cocktail. Non-lined cups are difficult to source from commercial providers, but to be sure your cups are in compliance, look at the interior to see if they are lined with another metal or confirm with your purveyor that your cups are NSF approved.

Copper exists naturally in small quantities in the human body. It's necessary to help regulate oxygen in the blood stream, and is even found in minute amounts in our drinking water, but too much copper can cause major health problems. While acute cases of copper poisoning can be treated, long-term overconsumption of copper can lead to copper toxicity, which affects multiple systems in the body. Heating copper to hot temperatures and cooking acidic food in copper cookware present the greatest risk of ill effects. For those serving drinks in copper cups, it is worth ensuring you have NSF approved cups.

The FDA Food Code, as well as the Plumbing Code, outline regulations related to copper utensils and copper plumbing. As an example, carbonators (pop and carbonated beverages) cannot have copper plumbing because they are highly acidic and, in the past, copper poisoning has resulted from acidic beverages leaching out the copper when going through these units.

There is currently no state data showing how many cases, if any, of copper poisoning have been linked to consuming a beverage from a copper cup.

The Iowa Restaurant Association protects, promotes, educates and advocates on behalf of Iowa's hospitality industry with legislators, regulators, media and the public. For more information visit [www.restaurantiowa.com](http://www.restaurantiowa.com).

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