

Dry martini?

Powdered booze is punch in a pouch

By STEVE WEINER
Associated Press

It's a powder much like those which turn into soft drinks or juice in water.

But this powder becomes an alcoholic beverage with a high-proof wallop.

Though federal and state officials say the powder isn't legal to sell, investors in Seattle and Portland hope to market it in pouches which will produce popular cocktails, beer and wine.

THEY HOPE to revolutionize the liquor business with a product that's easy to carry, cheap and potent.

"People aren't going to expect Mouton Rothschild out of a sack, but they won't be disappointed," says Mike Hill, a Seattle public relations man and marketing chief for Global Marketing Services.

"We want a person to open a package, mix it up and say, 'My God, this really is wine, or this really is a Bloody Mary.'

"One of my dreams has been to open a package like Kool-Aid and beer comes out of it."

The Sato Food Industry Co., near Nagoya, Japan, holds patents on the process which encapsulates alcohol in the powder form. Sato says the powder contains up to 30 per cent alcohol by weight.

Independent testing was done here on two samples provided by Hill. A sample of hot-spiced-wine mix was found by Food, Chemical and Research Laboratories, Inc., to contain 20.4 per cent alcohol by weight, and 5.6 per cent alcohol when mixed with water.

Its taste was considered about

average for a powdered drink.

A wine sample, tested by Dr. William Roth of the state Food and Drug Laboratory, held 22.5 per cent alcohol as a powder and 45 per cent when mixed with water. Roth's preliminary tests were conducted for the state Liquor Control Board.

Hill says Global, a Portland import-export firm, purchased marketing rights from Sato in May.

Sato has sold the powder in Japan as an additive, used in jelly, chocolate and foods enhanced by a liquor taste. The Japanese say they haven't used the powder for beverages because liquid liquor is readily available.

IF GOVERNMENT clearances can be obtained, Hill said, his firm will test market in two West Coast areas, with an eye towards marketing through normal liquor channels near the end of the year.

Formidable barriers remain, Hill acknowledges.

Theodore McPhadden, chief of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearm's industrial division in Washington, D. C., said the powder is considered to be a "rectified alcoholic product," and as such must be packaged in bottles.

Though the Treasury Department's packaging regulations could be changed, he said, "we don't want to facilitate the acquisition of alcoholic beverages by teen-agers. We feel if there were these pouches, kids would be buy-

ing them, putting them in their pockets and taking them to school."

Hill says pouches would be sold with the same safeguards as those used for bottled liquor. And he adds, "Any person who has cut his foot at the beach on a broken beer bottle will side with me."

Roger Lowell, a consumer-compliance officer for the Food and Drug Administration here, said that as an imported product, the powder must be cleared for compliance with health, safety and packaging laws.

Each control state would have to issue separate authorization for the powder to be sold, said Leroy Hittle, a member of the Washington Liquor Board.

Hill says Global will work with all control agencies to clear the product.

SOME non-governmental problems also remain.

The Sato powder formula does not dissolve well in cold water. It forms lumps, but Hill said Sato will produce larger granules to remedy that.

It isn't known whether Sato will be able to supply enough powder

to meet American needs. Further, a formula for beer hasn't been perfected, Hill says, though one with promise involves use of solidified carbon dioxide to produce the head and bubbles in the same way the gas makes crackling in the candy "Pop Rocks."

Yet Hill remains confident that SureShot mix will be approved and bought.

"This fits a need beautifully," he says. "If the government allows it, it will be on the market."

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