

Call for 1% of alcohol profits to tackle abuse By Catherine Shanahan

AN EXPERT in treating alcohol addiction has called on the drinks industry to ring fence 1% of its annual profits towards the research and treatment of alcohol abuse.

Dr Conor Farren, a consultant psychiatrist at St Patrick's University Hospital and clinical senior lecturer at Trinity College in Dublin, also estimated that as many as 250,000 Irish people suffer from alcoholism – an addiction that has direct health costs of €960 million a year.

"Just like the religious orders having to take responsibility for the consequences of their misbehaviour in relation to institutional child abuse, so the drinks industry must take responsibility for the consequences of their reckless promotion and profiteering over many years," Dr Farren said.

Dr Farren has also called for:

*Mandatory labelling of drinks to carry a health warning, such as "Alcohol can cause cirrhosis of the liver" or "Alcohol can cause birth abnormalities if taken in pregnancy".

* An increase in the rate of taxation on alcohol to a level that it begins to affect sales.

A spokesman for the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (DIGI) said alcohol misuse was "absolutely contrary to the interests of the drinks industry in Ireland".

He said it was "fully committed" to promoting a more responsible attitude to alcohol consumption and that this was "best demonstrated by our contribution of the €20m funding to Mature Enjoyment of Alcohol in Society and the highly visible www.drinkaware.ie".

The spokesman said the drinks industry was a major part of the Irish economy, employing more than 90,000 people and contributing more than €2 billion to the Exchequer and €1.25bn in exports.

He said DIGI would "continue to play a part in addressing the causes and consequences of misuse" by working in partnership with the Government, agencies and other stakeholders.

The spokesman also said higher taxes on alcohol had not proved effective in reducing alcohol-related harm.

In relation to alcohol carrying health warnings, he said DIGI had "consistently supported the provision of balanced information to consumers, including on product labels".

However, Dr Farren said the content of health warnings needed to be determined by a group of health experts, not by the industry.

He was also critical of the lack of in-patient beds to treat those with an alcohol addiction.