

TTB Alcohol Beverage Sampling Program 2016 Results

TTB's Alcohol Beverage Sampling Program (ABSP) is a random survey of products in the marketplace where we:

- Verify that the labels on alcohol beverages contain adequate descriptive information,
- Confirm that the labels are not likely to mislead consumers, and
- Determine where compliance issues exist.

Each year we purchase products from the marketplace and bring them to our offices for label assessments, where we first evaluate them for compliance with our labeling regulations. Following the label assessments, we send the products to our laboratories for a series of chemical analyses to assess whether the products themselves comply with the information displayed on the product labels.

Overview for 2016 Results

In 2016, we selected 175 distilled spirits, 157 malt beverages, and 118 wines for the 2016 ABSP, for a sample total of 450 products. After analyzing these products, we found 152 products that were non-compliant:

- Distilled spirits: 68 products
- Malt beverage: 53 products
- Wine: 31 products

Common Compliance Issues

Alcohol Content Tolerances

The most common compliance issues we identified involved alcohol content that did not match the label and was outside regulatory tolerances, or that placed the product in a different tax class than indicated by the label. Tolerances vary by commodity:

- Distilled spirits generally allow for a loss of 0.15% alcohol by volume; however, no tolerance is allowed for an increase in alcohol by volume (27 CFR 5.37(b)).
 - On average, for distilled spirits, underproof products were 0.66% alcohol by volume below what was shown on the label, and over proof products were 0.28% alcohol by volume above what was shown on the label.
 - To assist distillers with proofing issues, TTB offers our "TTB Proofing Video Series" available on the [Distilled Spirits - Frequently Used Proofing Processes](#) page. These instructional videos guide industry members, step-by-step, through several frequently

used proofing procedures. The videos include close-ups of techniques and processes, and explain why it is important to correctly follow all of the steps involved in proofing spirits. In addition, we encourage industry members to review the gauging manual found in [27 CFR part 30](#) and the [official methods](#) used by our [Scientific Services Division](#).

- Malt beverages generally allow for a tolerance of 0.3% alcohol by volume, either above or below the alcohol content stated on the label (27 CFR 7.71(c)).
 - For malt beverages, underproof products on average were 0.71% alcohol by volume below what was shown on the label, and over proof products were 0.94% alcohol by volume above what was shown on the label.
- Wines are allowed a tolerance of 1% alcohol by volume either above or below the stated label alcohol content for wine containing more than 14% alcohol by volume.
- Wines falling between 7% alcohol by volume and 14% alcohol by volume are allowed a tolerance of 1.5% alcohol by volume (27 CFR 4.36(b)).
 - For wine, two products were found to be outside of tolerance, with both being 1.7% underproof.
- If at any point a wine crosses into a different tax class, the tolerances no longer apply. For example, if a wine is labeled as 13.5%, but is found to actually be 14.2%, we would consider this a violation.
 - We found 8 wines with a tax class violation.

Non-Allowable Revisions

Another common compliance issue we identified involved labels that did not match their approved Certificate of Label Approval (COLA) due to changes that were not allowable revisions. 53 of the 155 non-compliant products, or approximately 34%, had labels that contained changes in information, either mandatory or non-mandatory, which differed from the COLA.

For a complete list of findings by commodity, see the charts below.

2016 Findings

You can find the [Definitions for Non-Compliance Categories](#) at TTB.gov.

Distilled Spirits

We identified 87 noncompliance issues in 68 different distilled spirits products.

Reasons for Noncompliance	Number of Products
Alcohol content: over	36
Non-mandatory information differs from the COLA (not an allowable revision)	18
Alcohol content: under	14
Mandatory information differs from the Certificate of Label Approval (COLA)	5
Mandatory information is missing	4
No COLA	2
Health Warning Statement has errors	2
Class, type, or statement of composition is incorrect	2
Prohibited practices	2
Other: Label not firmly affixed	1
Type-size/legibility	1
Grand Total	87

Malt Beverages

We identified 72 noncompliance issues in 53 different malt beverage products.

Reasons for Noncompliance	Number of Products
Non-mandatory information differs from the COLA (not an allowable revision)	21
Alcohol content: over	19
Alcohol content: under	10
Mandatory information is missing	6
Health Warning Statement has errors	5
Mandatory information differs from the Certificate of Label Approval (COLA)	4
Prohibited practices	4
Class, type, or statement of composition is incorrect	1
Statement of average analysis or serving facts statement is missing or is incorrect	1
Type-size/legibility	1
Grand Total	72

Wine

We identified 41 noncompliance issues in 31 different wine products.

Reasons for Noncompliance	Number of Products
Non-mandatory information differs from the COLA (not an allowable revision)	13
Tax class	8
Mandatory information differs from the Certificate of Label Approval (COLA)	6
Health Warning Statement has errors	5
Mandatory information is missing	3
Alcohol content: under	2
Prohibited practices	2
No COLA	1
Type-size/legibility	1
Grand Total	41