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TTB Tightens Mead Labeling Rules

Agency says beer mixed with mead cannot be sold under the mead name if it does not meet federal definitions

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The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau has updated its alcohol labeling guidance to make clear that producers cannot mix honey wine, or mead, with beer and then label the finished product as mead, a clarification that affects how some flavored and hybrid beverages can be marketed in the United States.

The agency also said that a malt beverage cannot be labeled as “mead” simply because it contains honey. Mead is a wine made from honey, while beer and malt beverages fall under different federal categories, and TTB said the label must reflect the product’s actual class and composition. The update is aimed at preventing misleading labels in a market where brewers and wineries have increasingly experimented with products that combine ingredients or borrow terms from other beverage categories.

TTB posted the revised guidance on its alcohol frequently asked questions page, where it addresses common labeling issues for breweries, wineries, importers and distributors. The agency said the rules are meant to help ensure that consumers are not confused about what they are buying and that producers use the correct standards of identity when naming their products.

The update also includes a reminder about volume declarations for certain wines sold in 12-fluid-ounce containers. For wines with an alcohol content of 7% ABV or higher packaged in 12 fl oz bottles or cans, the label must also state the metric equivalent of 355 mL. That requirement is part of TTB’s labeling rules for products sold in standard

U.S. serving sizes and is intended to align domestic labels with federal disclosure standards.

The clarification comes as beverage makers continue to test the boundaries between categories, especially in products that use honey, fruit or fermentation methods associated with both beer and wine. Under federal rules, however, the name on the label must match the product’s legal classification, not just its ingredients or marketing concept.

TTB said producers seeking approval for labels should review the applicable regulations before filing applications, since incorrect category names can delay approval or lead to rejection. The agency oversees labeling compliance for alcohol beverages sold in interstate commerce and uses its FAQ page to answer recurring questions about terms such as blend, bottle proof, gluten-free claims and brand-name use on malt beverages.

For companies working with mead-style products or honey-based beers, the guidance means labels will need to be reviewed carefully before release. A product that contains honey does not automatically qualify as mead, and a blend of mead and beer cannot be presented to consumers under that single name if it does not meet the federal definition.