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U.S. retail alcohol sales fell 0.9% in the third quarter

Circana data showed case volume dropped 2.8%, driven by deeper beer losses after ready-to-drink growth cooled.

Tuesday, October 6, 2026



U.S. alcohol sales in supermarkets, big-box stores and convenience outlets weakened in the third quarter as beer losses deepened and growth in ready-to-drink cocktails slowed, according to new retail scan data from market research firm Circana reported Tuesday by Brewbound.

Circana’s latest weekly off-premise report found that total beverage alcohol dollar sales in its tracked U.S. multi-outlet and convenience channels fell 0.9% from a year earlier over the latest 12 weeks through September 27, a period the report said roughly matches the third quarter. Sales for the period came to nearly $17.3 billion.

The downturn was sharper in volume terms. Case sales across beverage alcohol were down 2.8% year over year in the same 12-week span, according to the report.

Circana said the decline accelerated in the quarter because beer posted larger losses and ready-to-drink cocktail sales lost momentum. Brewbound’s report did not include a full category-by-category breakout in the available excerpt, but it said those two shifts were the main factors behind the broader third-quarter weakness.

The figures cover off-premise channels, meaning purchases made for consumption elsewhere rather than in bars and restaurants. In the United States, that part of the market is closely watched because it gives brewers, spirits suppliers, distributors and retailers a frequent read on what consumers are buying in everyday retail settings.

The third-quarter pullback points to a tougher retail environment for beverage alcohol after several years in which companies leaned on price increases, premium offerings and new product launches to defend revenue. With dollar sales down less than case volume, the data also indicate that higher pricing or product mix may still be limiting some of the revenue damage, even as unit demand remains under pressure. Circana’s report excerpt did not provide a fuller explanation for that gap.

Beer’s role in the quarterly decline is especially important because it remains one of the largest segments in U.S. beverage alcohol retail. A faster drop in beer sales can affect production planning, distributor inventories and shelf space decisions across the broader drinks market. It can also influence competition with other categories, including flavored malt beverages, spirits-based ready-to-drink products, wine and imported alcohol brands that rely on the same retail channels.

The slowdown in ready-to-drink cocktails also matters because that segment has been one of the industry’s main growth areas in recent years. If that category is losing speed while beer remains under pressure, suppliers across the beverage sector may face a

narrower set of near-term growth options heading into the final stretch of the year. That could shape forecasts for brewers, importers and wholesalers, as well as marketing and promotional decisions during an important selling period.

Brewbound cited the Circana data on Tuesday. Circana tracks sales through what it describes as total U.S. multi-outlet plus convenience channels, a broad retail view that typically includes major chain outlets and convenience stores but excludes most on-premise consumption.

The report arrives as beverage companies continue to watch consumer spending patterns closely. Across food and drink categories, operators have been trying to gauge how much shoppers are willing to spend, how often they trade down and whether convenience or premium positioning still supports growth. In alcohol, those questions have become more pressing as some categories lose volume and companies face a more crowded market for new launches.

Circana’s third-quarter reading suggests those pressures remained in place through late September, with beer acting as a larger drag and ready-to-drink cocktails no longer providing the same level of support they had offered earlier in the category’s expansion.