

**A Guide to meeting the new
standard drink labelling
requirement for alcoholic
beverages**

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Introduction

The standards regulating alcoholic beverages are defined in the *Food Standards Code*. The Code is developed and maintained by the National Food Authority (the Authority) and forms part of the food laws in each State and Territory. Before a new standard can be added to the Code or an existing standard changed, the National Food Standards Council, which comprises Health Ministers from each State, Territory and Commonwealth Government, must approve a recommendation from the Authority.

The Authority recommended the adoption of standard drink labelling into the Code following its evaluation of an application from the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy. The Authority concluded that there were clear public health and safety benefits to be gained by informing consumers in an easily understood way of the alcohol content of beverages. The National Food Standards Council endorsed the Authority's recommendations. The Council accepted that standard drink labelling information would further enhance existing and proposed public education campaigns based on the standard drink concept.

What new requirement?

New regulations are soon to be introduced requiring all containers of alcoholic beverages to be labelled with the number of standard drinks they contain.

Does it affect me?

If you are a manufacturer or an importer of alcoholic beverages you will need to comply with the new requirements.

What products are affected?

All alcoholic beverages, whether made in Australia or imported, and which are sold to the public in packaged form, that is, bottles, cans, casks or other containers.

The labelling requirement does not apply to:

- alcoholic beverages which are sold for on-premise consumption in containers such as glasses, jugs or carafes;
- large volume or bulk containers used exclusively for trade purposes and not available to the public; or
- outer packages (e.g. shipping boxes) which are not sold to the public.

Where one or more individual containers are sold to the public in an outer package (such as cartons of beer or gift boxes of, for example, a bottle of spirits), the outer package would need to be labelled with standard drink information about the enclosed container(s).

When does the requirement take effect?

The new requirement comes into effect on 22 December 1995.

What about products packaged before then?

They are not affected—only products labelled on or after 22 December 1995 will need to meet the new labelling requirement. Products may, of course, be labelled with standard drinks before this date.

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink is that amount of an alcoholic beverage which contains 10 grams of alcohol.

For example a middy (285 mL) of regular strength beer, a small glass (100 mL) of wine, a nip (30 mL) of spirits or a glass (60 mL) of fortified wine all contain about one standard drink.

How do I calculate the number of standard drinks in a container and what does the labelling statement have to say?

The calculation is simple—just follow this formula:

$$\begin{array}{rcccl} \text{Volume of} & & \% \text{ alcohol} & & \text{The number} \\ \text{container} & \times & \text{by volume} & \times & \text{of standard} \\ \text{(litres)*} & & \text{(mL/100 mL)} & & \text{drinks} \\ & & & \times & 0.789^{**} = \end{array}$$

* For example a 750 mL bottle is 0.75 litres ** The specific gravity of ethanol is 0.789

The statement must indicate the number of standard drinks in the container. Examples of the calculation and required wording on some typical products are as follows:

Example 1

**A 750 mL bottle of wine which is 12.5% alcohol by volume would contain
 $0.75 \times 12.5 \times 0.789 = 7.39$ standard drinks.**

This would be rounded up to 7.4 standard drinks

and the label would need to say:

'CONTAINS APPROXIMATELY 7.4 STANDARD DRINKS' or

'APPROX 7.4 STANDARD DRINKS'

Example 2

A 375 mL can of beer which is 4.9% alcohol by volume would contain
 $0.375 \times 4.9 \times 0.789 = 1.44$ standard drinks.

This would be rounded down to 1.4 standard drinks
and the label would need to say:

'CONTAINS APPROXIMATELY 1.4 STANDARD DRINKS' or
'APPROX 1.4 STANDARD DRINKS'

Example 3

A 700 mL bottle of whisky which is 37.5% alcohol by volume would contain
 $0.70 \times 37.5 \times 0.789 = 20.71$ standard drinks.

This would be rounded up to 21 standard drinks.
and the label would need to say:

'CONTAINS APPROXIMATELY 21 STANDARD DRINKS' or
'APPROX 21 STANDARD DRINKS'

Note: 'STD' is not advisable as an abbreviation for the word 'STANDARD'.

See the chart at the back of this guide for the number of standard drinks in some typical beverages.

How accurate does the statement have to be?

In containers holding 10 or less standard drinks, it needs to be accurate to the first decimal place.

In containers holding more than 10 standard drinks, it needs to be accurate to the nearest whole number of standard drinks.

Where does the statement have to go and how big should it be?

Standard drink information can be placed anywhere on the product label.

It would be most helpful to consumers if the standard drink information was adjacent to the percent alcohol by volume (% alc/vol) statement.

Standard drink labelling is no different to other forms of labelling required by the *Food Standards Code*. Such information needs to be:

- in English;
- distinct, legible and indelible;
- conspicuously visible to a prospective purchaser;
- in characters of uniform size, style and colour;
- in a colour which is in distinct contrast to the background; and
- in type which is:
 - . bold-faced sanserif capital letters at least 1.5 mm; or
 - . other bold-faced letters at least 2.25 mm high; or
 - . other letters at least 3mm high.

What about the old 'percent alcohol by volume' labelling statement?

Standard drinks labelling is required in addition to the percent alcohol by volume labelling and other labelling requirements of the *Food Standards Code*.

Standard drink calculations should be consistent with the percent alcohol by volume amount declared on the label.

Examples of approximate number of standard drinks in some typical products

BEERS		
VOLUME (mL)	STRENGTH (% alc/vol)	APPROX NO. OF STANDARD DRINKS (to first decimal place)
375	0.9	0.3
375	2.0	0.6
375	2.2	0.7
375	2.5	0.7
375	2.7	0.8
375	3.5	1.0
375	4.8	1.4
375	4.9	1.4
375	5.0	1.5
375	5.5	1.6
375	6.0	1.8
750	0.9	0.5
750	2.0	1.2
750	2.2	1.3
750	2.5	1.5
750	2.7	1.6
750	3.5	2.1
750	4.8	2.8
750	4.9	2.9
750	5.0	3.0
750	5.5	3.3
750	6.0	3.6

SPIRITS		
VOLUME (mL)	STRENGTH (% alc/vol)	APPROX NO. OF STANDARD DRINKS (to nearest whole number*)
700	37.0	20
700	37.5	21
700	40.0	22
700	43.0	24
750	37.0	22
750	37.5	22
750	40.0	24

LIQUEURS		
VOLUME (mL)	STRENGTH (% alc/vol)	APPROX NO. OF STANDARD DRINKS (to first decimal place or nearest whole number*)
350	24.0	6.6
350	26.5	7.3
350	40.0	11
375	17.0	5.0
700	17.0	9.4
700	24.0	13
700	26.5	15
700	40.0	22

* Products containing more than 10 standard drinks may be rounded to nearest whole number.

WINES

VOLUME (mL)	STRENGTH (% alc/vol)	APPROX NO. OF STANDARD DRINKS (to first decimal place or nearest whole number*)
750	10.0	5.9
750	10.5	6.2
750	11.0	6.5
750	11.5	6.8
750	12.0	7.1
750	12.5	7.4
750	13.0	7.7
750	13.5	8.0
4000	10.0	32
4000	11.0	35
4000	12.0	38

FORTIFIED WINES

VOLUME (mL)	STRENGTH (% alc/vol)	APPROX NO. OF STANDARD DRINKS (to nearest whole number*)
750	17.5	10
750	18.0	11
750	18.5	11
750	19.0	11

* Products containing more than 10 standard drinks may be rounded to nearest whole number