

## Guide for Importing Alcohol Beverage Samples into the United States (U.S.)



The importing of alcoholic beverage samples into the U.S. is highly regulated, which makes it a complex and time-consuming process. Take the necessary time to research and prepare to comply with all U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) requirements. To begin the process, consider the following information on how to import alcoholic beverage samples into the U.S:

### Obtain a Federal Basic Permit.

- Importers of alcoholic beverages (e.g., distilled spirits, wine or malt beverages) as defined in the [Federal Alcohol Administration Act](#) must obtain a Federal Basic Permit with the TTB National Revenue Centre (NRC) to import alcoholic beverage samples to distribute to wholesalers and retailers. For more information on applying for a permit electronically, click [here](#).

### Obtain FDA Food Facility Registration.

- To carry out certain provisions of the Bioterrorism Act, the FDA requires importers of alcoholic beverage samples to register their food facility with the FDA to be compliant with the [Food Safety Modernization Act \(FSMA\)](#). For more information on registration of food facilities, click [here](#).

### Clearly mark alcoholic beverage samples.

- All alcoholic beverage samples and packaging must be clearly marked "SAMPLES ONLY – Not for Resale." It is recommended to contact TTB to confirm the sample size for your specific product as it varies by alcoholic beverage.

### Secure an Importer of Record.

- An Importer of Record that has a licence to import alcoholic beverages into the U.S. must be secured before alcoholic beverage samples can be shipped.

### Submit a Certificate of Label Approval (COLA) Waiver.

- U.S. federal law and customs requires all importers of alcoholic beverages samples that have not received formal COLA approval to obtain a COLA Waiver from the TTB. A COLA Waiver is a single use waiver to import alcoholic beverage sample(s) one-time with minimal required information on the packaging. COLA Waiver requests alcoholic beverage sample information for each unique product such as type of alcoholic beverage class/type (must qualify under TTB's standards of class/type), brand name,

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unit size, number of units, percentage of alcohol by volume (ABV), country of origin, as well as FDA Food Facility Registration number, Federal Basic Permit number, the importer's name and address (as shown on the Federal Basic Permit), and a signature of the individual authorized on the Federal Basic Permit with signature authority of the importer, and the purpose of importation (including specific event dates and locations). It is imperative that the information on the COLA Waiver matches the sample product exactly or the TTB will reject it. COLA Waivers must accompany the alcoholic beverage sample shipment. To submit a COLA Waiver click, [here](#).

### Create a commercial invoice to include with the samples.

- Alcoholic beverage samples must accompany a commercial invoice that includes product information, commercial value and the Importer of Record.

### Secure a private carrier to ship the samples.

- Ship the alcoholic beverage samples through a private carrier (e.g., [United Parcel Service, Inc. \(UPS\)](#), [FedEx](#)). Note that not all carriers ship alcoholic beverages, and a valid alcoholic beverage shipping license is a requirement to ship the sample(s).

### Submit Prior Notice (PN) to the FDA.

- Submit a PN to the FDA so that they can evaluate the safety of the alcoholic beverage sample shipment. For more information on PN of imported foods, click [here](#).

Importing alcoholic beverage samples into the U.S. requires careful adherence to federal and state laws and private carrier requirements. Remember to work closely with the Importer of Record and courier to ensure that all necessary documents are in place before submitting to CBP, FDA and TTB to avoid unnecessary costs and delays.

Note that these requirements are subject to change without notice. It is up to the importer to do their diligence and verify that they have the most up-to-date information before proceeding with importing alcoholic beverage samples into the U.S.

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