



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Low Alcohol Descriptors Guidance

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Low Alcohol Descriptors Guidance

Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance concerns the appropriate use of low alcohol descriptors, to support the alcohol and retail industries in marketing their products responsibly, with the aim of protecting the public and helping to inform consumer. It sets out the Government's expectations in relation to how low alcohol drinks (those of 1.2% abv or less) may be described, and replaces the rules set out in the Food Labelling Regulations 1996, which were revoked on 13 December 2018.
- 1.2 The Department of Health and Social Care in England held a [public consultation](#) to seek views on whether the four descriptors previously set out in legislation could be effectively communicated through guidance and whether the public still found those descriptors helpful. Following the consultation, the decision was made to replace the legislation with guidance setting out the four existing descriptors that industry will be expected to follow.
- 1.3 The consultation also sought views on introducing new descriptors for products above 1.2% abv, but concluded that there was no new evidence to suggest that introducing such descriptors would have a beneficial impact on public health. However, this will be kept under review if the evidence base changes.
- 1.4 There is still a legal requirement to ensure that products comply with other labelling and advertising rules. These include the requirement to ensure information is not misleading and that it is clear, accurate and easy to understand.

Alcohol substitute drink

- 1.5 This guidance only applies to a product marketed as an alcohol substitute drink and not soft beverages. An alcohol substitute drink is defined in [regulation 9 to the Soft Drinks Industry Levy Regulations 2018](#).

EU rules

- 1.6 There are also certain categories of drinks that may only be described in accordance with EU laws. These are highlighted in the relevant descriptor section below. The UK will be leaving the EU on 29 March 2019 and this guidance will be reviewed after that to ensure it remains accurate and continues to help inform consumers and industry.

The Descriptors

- 1.7 Use of the descriptors is voluntary. If they are used, this guidance sets the suggested conditions for their use. The descriptors are:

Low alcohol – the drink must be 1.2% alcohol by volume (abv) or below and an indication of its maximum abv should be included on the label.

Non-alcoholic – this should not be used in conjunction with a name commonly associated with an alcoholic drink. There is an exception for non-alcoholic wine where it is derived from unfermented grape juice and is intended exclusively for communion or sacramental use. The labelling or advertising of these non-alcoholic wine should make it clear that it is exclusively for such use.

Alcohol free – this should only be applied to a drink from which the alcohol has been extracted if it contains no more than 0.05% abv, and the products should also include the abv (or state that they contain no alcohol) on the label in order to use the descriptor.

De-alcoholised – this term should only be applied to a drink from which the alcohol has been extracted if it contains no more than 0.5% abv and the product should also include an indication of its alcoholic strength (or state that it contains no alcohol).

Exceptions

- 1.8 The descriptors can be used with the majority of drink categories, although their use is restricted for wines and spirits and spirit mixers. These restrictions are outlined below:

Products that are similar to **wine** should not be described as wine if they have reduced alcohol content. The word “wine” can only be used on a product that meets the appropriate production specification and has an alcohol content of 8% minimum, except for specific Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), where the minimum is below 8% abv. Low alcohol products may be referred to as a “**wine based drink**” and then can be used with the descriptors above. Source see: Paragraph 1 of Part II of Annex VII of EU Regulation 1308/2013 establishes definitions for wine sector products.

Spirits – the descriptors cannot be currently used with spirit drinks as defined in EU 110/2008.

Spirit mixers – the low alcohol descriptor may only be used where the alcohol in the product comes exclusively from the spirits drink product being referenced. Source see EU Regulation 110/2008 which provides rules on the definition, description, presentation,

labelling and the protection of spirit drinks. The names of spirit drink categories can only be used in the presentation of drinks which meet the regulatory definition. The exception is in a list of ingredients for foodstuffs, or for compound terms and allusions provided that the alcohol originates exclusively from the spirit drink(s) referred to (Articles 2 & 4 Regulation 716/2013, Articles 9 & 10 Regulation 110/2008).

Presentation and labelling

- 1.9 A descriptor, if used, should be clearly presented on the front of the label and wherever the alcohol strength may be repeated. If the drinks are dispensed on draught, the descriptors should be clear to the consumer prior to or at the point of purchase.
- 1.10 It is a requirement to label the nutritional contents and ingredients for all drinks with 1.2% abv or below. Advice on food labelling and packaging is available [here](#).

Mutual recognition

- 1.11 Products from elsewhere in the EU that are below 1.2% abv and are labelled in accordance with rules in their country of origin may continue to be sold in the UK while the UK is subject to EU rules. It is suggested that suppliers exporting to the UK could voluntarily provide labelling on their products in line with this guidance.

Enforcement

- 1.12 Local Trading Standards Departments are responsible for ensuring that labelling is compliant with the law and will have regard to this guidance to help determine compliance. A breach of the descriptor rules could lead to enforcement action against the Food Business Operator if it means that the labelling is misleading, inaccurate or unclear.

Guidance review

- 1.13 This guidance is for England. The Department of Health and Social Care for England will review the guidance on a regular basis.

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