



# Quick Guide: Classifying Alcoholic Beverages

The following Quick Guide address how the District of Columbia classifies various types of alcoholic beverage products. The type of classification a product falls into may impact the type of the license required to manufacture, distribute, or sell the product. The classification may also impact taxation.

## RELEVANT LAW

The law addressing the classification of various alcoholic beverages may be found at:

- D.C. Official Code §§ 25-101(4) (“Alcohol”); 25-101(10) (“Beer”); 25-101(49) (Spirits); and 25-101(56) (“Wine”).

## MINIMUM ALCOHOL CONTENT

Any product that contains one-half of 1% of alcohol by volume (ABV) or greater qualifies as an alcoholic beverage and is regulated by Title 25 of the D.C. Official Code and Title 23 of the D.C. Municipal Regulations. Products that fall below one-half of 1% ABV are not regulated by these laws and regulations.

## FOOD PRODUCTS

The alcohol laws apply to both liquid and solid products. This means that food products infused with alcohol and having a high enough ABV will be treated and regulated as alcoholic beverages.

## TYPES OF CLASSIFICATIONS

All alcoholic beverages will be classified as one of the following types of products:

- *Beer* – any alcoholic beverage derived in whole or in part from malt, malt substitute and containing an ABV equal or less than 15%.
- *Wine* – any alcoholic beverage derived from fruit, sugar, or other agricultural products (except malt or malt substitute) and containing an ABV equal or less than 15%.
- *Spirits* – any alcoholic beverage containing an ABV greater than 15%

## CLASSIFICATION OF COMMON PRODUCTS

Whether a product falls into one classification or another will depend on the amount of alcohol in the product, the ingredients, and the source of the alcohol. In general, the following products will be defined as follows:

- *Cider* – Wine
- *Flavored Malt Beverage* – Beer

- *Hard Seltzer* – If the alcohol is derived from malt or a malt substitute, it will be classified as a beer. If the alcohol is derived from fruit, sugar, or other agricultural products, then it will be considered a wine.
- *Kombucha* – Wine (if it has a high enough ABV to trigger the application of the District’s alcohol laws).
- *Premixed Cocktail Beverages* – If the ABV is above 15%, the product will be considered a spirit. If the ABV is 15% or below, it will be a beer if derived from malt or malt substitute (e.g., whiskey) or wine if derived from fruit, sugar, or other agricultural products (e.g., rum).
- *Sake* – Beer

## TAXES

ABRA does not have jurisdiction over tax-related matters. All tax questions should be addressed to the District of Columbia Office of Tax and Revenue (OTR). OTR’s contact information is as follows:

Address: 1101 4th Street, SW, Suite 270 West, Washington, DC 20024

Phone: (202) 727-4829

TTY: 711

Email: [taxhelp@dc.gov](mailto:taxhelp@dc.gov)

## CONTACT

For more information or if you need help determining whether an event requires a liquor license, visit [ABRA.DC.Gov](http://ABRA.DC.Gov) or contact ABRA at 202-442-4423 or [ABRA@DC.Gov](mailto:ABRA@DC.Gov).