

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Innovation, Industry, and Technology

BILL: SB 962

INTRODUCER: Senator Diaz

SUBJECT: Malt Beverages

DATE: March 11, 2019

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Oxamendi	Imhof	IT	Pre-meeting
2.			CM	
3.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 962 provides a process for returns of malt beverages by a vendor to a distributor for an exchange of product, a refund, or a credit. A vendor may return malt beverages to a distributor if the malt beverages are a “damaged product,” an “out-of-code” product,” or an “undamaged product.” An “out-of-code product” is a malt beverage that has exceeded the manufacturer’s code date indicating the product’s freshness and availability for purchase at retail. A distributor is not required to accept a return request.

The bill prohibits the sale of malt beverages on consignment or on any basis other than a bona fide sale. A product may not be returned because it is overstocked or slow-moving or because there is only limited or seasonal demand for the product.

Under the bill, a vendor may request return of undamaged product to a distributor only for exchange of product or for credit. Returns of damaged and undamaged products must be made within seven days after the delivery date. Damaged product maybe returned for an exchange of product or a credit. The bill specifies the circumstances in which damaged or undamaged malt beverages may be returned if requested by the vendor.

Under the bill, an out-of-code product may be returned to a distributor only for an exchange of product at any time if the conditions in the bill are satisfied, e.g., the manufacturer’s code date is printed on the product container or, in the case of a keg, marked on a cap, collar, tag, or label affixed to the keg.

The bill requires a malt beverage distributor to keep a written record of each return of malt beverages.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2019.

II. Present Situation:

In Florida, alcoholic beverages are regulated by the Beverage Law,¹ which regulates the manufacture, distribution, and sale of wine, beer, and liquor by manufacturers, distributors, and vendors.² The Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco (division) in the Department of Business and Professional Regulation administers and enforces the Beverage Law.³

“Alcoholic beverages” are defined in s. 561.01, F.S., as “distilled spirits and all beverages containing one-half of one percent or more alcohol by volume.” “Malt beverages” are brewed alcoholic beverages containing malt.⁴

Section 561.14, F.S., specifies the license and registration classifications used in the Beverage Law.

- “Manufacturers” are those “licensed to manufacture alcoholic beverages and distribute the same at wholesale to licensed distributors and to no one else within the state, unless authorized by statute.”⁵
- “Distributors” are those “licensed to sell and distribute alcoholic beverages at wholesale to persons who are licensed to sell alcoholic beverages.”⁶
- “Importers” are those licensed to sell, or to cause to be sold, shipped, and invoiced, alcoholic beverages to licensed manufacturers or licensed distributors, and to no one else in this state; provided that ss. 564.045 and 565.095, F.S., relating to primary American source of supply licensure, are in no way violated by such imports.⁷
- “Vendors” are those “licensed to sell alcoholic beverages at retail only” and who may not “purchase or acquire in any manner for the purpose of resale any alcoholic beverages from any person not licensed as a vendor, manufacturer, bottler, or distributor under the Beverage Law.”⁸

Three-Tier System

In the United States, the regulation of alcohol since the repeal of Prohibition has traditionally been based upon a “three-tier system.” The system requires separation of the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcoholic beverages. The manufacturer creates the beverages, and the distributor obtains the beverages from the manufacturer to deliver to the vendor. The vendor makes the ultimate sale to the consumer.⁹ A manufacturer, distributor, or exporter may not be licensed as a vendor to sell directly to consumers.¹⁰

¹ Section 561.01(6), F.S., provides that the “The Beverage Law” means chs. 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 567, and 568, F.S.

² See s. 561.14, F.S.

³ Section 561.02, F.S.

⁴ Section 563.01, F.S.

⁵ Section 561.14(1), F.S.

⁶ Section 561.14(2), F.S.

⁷ Section 561.01(5), F.S.

⁸ Section 561.14(3), F.S.

⁹ Section 561.14, F.S.

¹⁰ Section 561.22(1), F.S.

Generally, in Florida, only licensed vendors are permitted to sell alcoholic beverages directly to consumers at retail.¹¹ Licensed manufacturers, distributors, and registered exporters are prohibited from also being licensed as vendors.¹² Manufacturers are also generally prohibited from having an interest in a vendor and from distributing directly to a vendor.¹³

Tied House Evil Prohibitions

States have enacted statutes designed to prevent or limit the control of retail alcoholic beverage vendors by manufacturers, wholesalers, and importers, or to prohibit "tied-house arrangements." Such legislation is referred to as "tied house" or "tied house evil" statutes.¹⁴

Section 561.42, F.S., Florida's "tied house evil" statute, regulates the permitted and prohibited relationships and interactions of manufacturers and distributors with vendors in order to prevent a manufacturer or distributor from having a financial interest, directly or indirectly, in the establishment or business of a licensed vendor, and to prevent a manufacturer or distributor from giving a vendor gifts, loans or property, or rebates.¹⁵ The prohibitions also apply to an importer, primary American source of supply registrant,¹⁶ brand owner or registrant, broker, and sales agent (or sales person thereof).

The tied house evil statute also prohibits any distributor or vendor from receiving any financial incentives from any manufacturer. It further prohibits manufacturers or distributors from assisting retail vendors by gifts or loans of money or property or by the giving of rebates. These prohibitions do not, however, apply to any bottles, barrels, or other containers necessary for the legitimate transportation of such beverages, to advertising materials, or to the extension of credit for liquors sold, if made strictly in compliance with the provisions of s. 561.42, F.S.¹⁷

Section 561.42, F.S., also prohibits licensed manufacturers and distributors from:

- Making further sales to vendors that the division has certified as not having fully paid for all liquors previously purchased;¹⁸
- Directly or indirectly giving, lending, renting, selling, or in any other manner furnishing to a vendor any outside sign, printed, painted, electric, or otherwise;¹⁹
- Providing neon or electric signs, window painting and decalcomanias, posters, placards, and other advertising material herein authorized to be used or displayed by the vendor in the interior of the licensed premises;²⁰ and
- Providing expendable retail advertising specialties, unless sold to the vendor at not less than the actual cost to the industry member who initially purchased them.²¹

¹¹ Section 561.14(3), F.S. However, see the exceptions provided in ss. 561.221 and 565.03, F.S.

¹² Section 561.22, F.S.

¹³ Sections 563.022(14) and 561.14(1), F.S.

¹⁴ 45 AM. JUR. 2d *Intoxicating Liquors*, s. 94 (2017).

¹⁵ Section 561.42(1), F.S.

¹⁶ See s. 564.045, F.S.

¹⁷ Section 564.42(1). Section 561.42(2), F.S., permits distributors to extend credit for the sale of liquors to any vendor up to, but not including, the 10th day after the calendar week within which such sale was made.

¹⁸ Section 561.42(4), F.S.

¹⁹ Section 561.42(10), F.S.

²⁰ Section 561.42(12), F.S.

²¹ Section 561.42(14)(a), F.S.

Section 561.42(14), F.S., further prohibits industry members from providing expendable retail advertising specialties, unless sold to the vendor at not less than the actual cost to the industry member who initially purchased them. A member of the malt beverage industry may provide a vendor with expendable retailer advertising specialties such as trays, coasters, mats, menu cards, napkins, cups, glasses, thermometers, and the like. The industry member must sell these items to a vendor only at a price not less than the actual cost to the industry member who initially purchased the items, without limitation in total dollar value of such items sold to a vendor. Industry members may not engage in cooperative advertising with a vendor.²²

Division Rules - Returns of Products

Florida law does not address the return of products to distributors by vendors. The division has adopted rules to provide guidance to the industry.

Return of Damaged Products

Products are damaged if they exhibit product deterioration, leaking containers, damaged labels, or missing or mutilated tamper-evident closures.²³

Under the division's rule, a vendor must request for return of damaged products within 15 days after delivery and may receive an exchange of product, cash, or a credit. A vendor may not return products damaged by the vendor or vendor's customers.²⁴ A distributor is required to make and keep a record of all exchanges of damaged products for product, cash, or credit.²⁵ Under current law, each manufacturer, distributor, broker, agent, and importer licensed under the Beverage Law is required to maintain and keep, for a period of three years at the licensed place of business, such records of alcoholic beverages received, sold, or delivered within or without this state as may be required by the division.²⁶

If the vendor requests a return 15 or more days after delivery, a return may only be for exchange, cash, or credit, under the following circumstances:

- A manufacturer has issued a product recall that affects multiple unaffiliated vendors; or
- A product has deteriorated due to manufacturing or packaging problems.

Return of Undamaged Products

A vendor must request for return of undamaged products within 10 days after delivery and may receive cash or a credit within 10 days of the request.²⁷ A distributor is required to make and keep a record of all undamaged products returned for cash or credit (not an exchange).²⁸

If the vendor requests a return 10 or more days after delivery, a return may only be:

- For cash or credit, if the products may no longer be lawfully sold due to a change of law;

²² Section 561.42(14)(e), F.S.

²³ Fla. Admin. Code R. 61A-1.0107(1) (2018)

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ Fla. Admin. Code R. 61A-1.0107(2) (2018)

²⁶ Section 561.55(3)(a), F.S.

²⁷ Fla. Admin. Code R. 61A-1.0108(1) (2018)

²⁸ *Id.*

- For cash or credit, if the vendor's business is terminated. This does not include a temporary seasonal shutdown;
- For an equal exchange of product, if there is a change in product, such as a change in formula, proof, label, or container;
- For cash or credit, if the product is discontinued; or
- For cash or credit, if a vendor, who is only open for a portion of the year, has product remaining at closure that will spoil in the off-season.²⁹

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill creates s. 563.061, F.S., to provide a process for returns of malt beverages by a vendor to a distributor for exchange of product, refund, or credit. A vendor may return malt beverages to a distributor if the malt beverages are a "damaged product," an "out-of-code" product," or an "undamaged product."

Definitions

The bill defines a "damaged product" to mean

Malt beverages, whether sold in individual containers or kegs, which, upon delivery to a vendor, exhibit product deterioration, defective seals, leaking, damaged labels, or missing or mutilated tamper-evident closures.

A "manufacturer's code date" is defined to mean:

A coded best-by date, expiration date, or other designated date or dating system established by a manufacturer to signify the freshness of its malt beverages and which is printed on the malt beverage container or, in the case of a keg, marked on a cap, collar, tag, or label affixed to the keg.

An "out-of-code product" is defined to mean:

Malt beverages, whether sold in individual containers or kegs, which have exceeded the manufacturer's code date and which, according to the manufacturer's policies, must be removed and replaced with fresh products to ensure that only fresh malt beverages are available for purchase at retail.

An "undamaged product" is defined as those products that are not a "damaged product" or an "out-of-code product."

Prohibitions

The bill prohibits the sale of malt beverages on consignment or on any basis other than a bona fide sale. A return of malt beverages to a distributor is only allowed for the ordinary and usual commercial reasons authorized by the bill. A product may not be returned because it is overstocked or slow-moving or because there is only limited or seasonal demand for the product.

²⁹ Fla. Admin. Code R. 61A-1.0108(2) (2018)

Returns of Undamaged Product

Under the bill, a vendor may request return of undamaged product to a distributor only for exchange of product or for credit. A distributor may not accept a return of undamaged product unless the return is requested within 7 days after the delivery date. However, a distributor may accept a return of undamaged product for:

- Credit or refund, if there is a change in regulation or administrative procedure over which the vendor or its employees or agents have no control, e.g., a change in authorized container sizes;
- Credit or refund, if a vendor terminates operations (a vendor's temporary seasonal shutdown is not a termination of operation) and requests return of any remaining products on hand;
- Exchange of product, if a vendor requests return of a product for purposes of quality control or freshness, and the product has not yet exceeded the manufacturer's code date;
- Exchange of product or credit, if a manufacturer has issued a product recall that affects multiple vendors who are not affiliated with one another through having common ownership, through being members of the same pool buying group, or through being members of the same advertising cooperative;
- Credit or refund, if a vendor requests a return because the production or importation of a product is discontinued; or
- Credit or refund, if a vendor who is open for a portion of the year has product remaining at closure which, with respect to quality control or freshness, would become unsuitable for sale during the off-season, according to the manufacturer's code date.

Returns of Damaged Products

The bill permits a vendor to request return of damaged product to a distributor, if:

- The return is for exchange of product or for a credit;
- The vendor makes the request within seven days after the delivery date;
- The distributor verifies that the product is damaged before accepting the return; and
- The product was not damaged by the vendor or its customers.

Returns of Out-of-Code Product

The bill permits a vendor to return out-of-code product to a distributor only for an exchange of product. The distributor must first verify that the product is an out-of-code product. A distributor may accept out-of-code product at any time, if:

- The manufacturer has written policies and procedures that specify the date that product should be removed;
- The manufacturer's policies and procedures are readily verifiable and consistently followed by the manufacturer; and
- The manufacturer's code date is printed on the product container or, in the case of a keg, marked on a cap, collar, tag, or label affixed to the keg.

The bill and current law do not require malt beverages manufacturers to maintain readily verifiable and consistently followed written policies regarding the date malt beverages products should be removed.

Out-of-code product returned to a distributor may not reenter the retail market.

Exchanges of Product

The bill requires that an exchange of product must be in exact quantities with product of near or equal value made by the same manufacturer and in the same size individual container or keg. If a credit is permitted, the credit must be issued at the time of the return with supporting documentation.

Distributor Requirements

Under the bill, a distributor is not required to accept returns of product. If a distributor accepts a return of product, the distributor must:

- Provide the exchange of product, the credit, or the refund to the vendor, as authorized under the bill, at the same time the distributor picks up the product being returned; and
- Pick up damaged or undamaged products being returned within 14 days after receipt of the vendor's request.

Recordkeeping Requirement

The bill requires a distributor to keep and maintain a transaction record of each return for 3 years. The distributor must provide a copy of the transaction record to the vendor in a format accessible by and legible to the vendor.

Other Provisions

The bill provides that bona fide returns for exchange of product, credit, or refund are not considered gifts, loans, or other forms of financial aid or assistance as prohibited by s. 561.42, F.S.

As provided in s. 561.29, F.S., the bill requires the division to impose a civil penalty of \$1,000 per violation against a distributor or vendor who violates s. 563.061, F.S., or any rule adopted under this section.

The bill also authorizes the division to adopt rules to administer and enforce s. 563.061, F.S.

Effective Date

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2019.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill creates section 563.061 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
