

Terminal Specific Gravity and Vermont's Definition of "Malt Beverage"

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Traditional beers that have been fermented for clarity, fermented with hearty yeasts, or that have been brewed using "top down" methods may be caught by the terminal specific gravity exception in 7 V.S.A. § 2.

- 7 V.S.A. § 2 states in part: "[If a] beverage has an alcohol content of more than six percent and has a terminal specific gravity of less than 1.009, it shall be deemed to be a spirit and not a malt beverage."
- "Terminal specific gravity" or "final specific gravity" is a fluid density measurement that reflects the amount of sugars and other biomass in a liquid.
- Specific gravity is measured in reference to the density of water (1.000).
- The terminal specific gravity reading informs the brewer about:
 - the amount of malt and other biomass that has been consumed by the yeast;
 - the amount of alcohol and carbonation that has been produced; and
 - the amount of yeast that remains in the unfiltered beer.
- With some yeast strains and brewing methods, a specific gravity reading of 1.009 or less indicates a malt beverage with greater clarity and higher alcohol content.
- The final alcohol content is dependent on the original malt content ("original gravity").
- The following beers could, in some instances, be considered "spirits" under Vermont law:
 - Dark American Lager
 - Double Pils
 - Czech Pils
 - Cream Ale
 - Blonde Ale
 - Kölsch
 - American Wheat
 - Rye Beer
 - Altbier (when "doubled")
 - American Pale Ale
 - American Brown Ale
 - Oatmeal Stout
 - American Stout
 - Belgian Dubbel
 - Belgian Tripel
 - Belgian Golden Strong Ale
 - Belgian Dark Strong Ale
 - India Pale Ale (American, English, or Imperial)
 - Dunkelweizen
 - Roggenbier
 - Saison
 - Biere de Garde
 - Flanders Red
 - Oud Bruin
 - Flanders Brown Ale
 - Straight Lambic
 - Geuze
 - Fruit Lambic
 - Belgian Blonde
- Whether any of these beers might be deemed a "spirit" instead of a "malt beverage" is dependent on the types of malts, quality of water, natural fruit or vegetable additives, and strain of yeast used.
 - For example, a rogggenbier recipe that uses high gravity rye malts and a hearty weizen yeast (a yeast with high attenuation and alcohol tolerance), will ferment to a low terminal specific gravity and an alcohol content of 6% or higher.