

The Brewer's Voluntary Disclosure Initiative: A Recipe for Costlier Craft Beer?

BY JULIE K. O'NEILL • MAY 2, 2017

The Beer Institute, a trade association based in Washington, D.C. that represents brewers both big and small, as well as importers and suppliers to the beer industry, has recently published what it calls "The Brewer's Voluntary Disclosure Initiative." The idea is for brewers and importers to voluntarily agree to disclose certain information to consumers – calories, carbohydrates, protein, fat, and alcohol by volume or weight on the product label. The Initiative also calls for listing all ingredients and a freshness date on either the label or secondary packaging or through a website reference or bar code. In theory, this will allow consumers to make better-informed decisions. Some consumers may appreciate having the information available, but others probably would rather avoid it. Think about it – do you really want to know exactly how many calories are in that beer?

Many of the big beer companies like Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors have already agreed to follow these guidelines. This is not a surprise, since the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Beer Institute are big shots with Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors, respectively. But the more pressing reason is that starting in May of 2018, the FDA is requiring restaurants with 20 or more locations nationwide to disclose calories and other nutrition information for standard menu items, including beverages. Many chain restaurants have been providing most of this information for some time, as the compliance date initially was set to be earlier but has been extended several times.

If a new or existing craft brewery seeks to distribute its beer to restaurants, it may need to factor nutritional testing into startup or business costs. The cost of testing a batch of beer to gather this information is estimated to be between $300 and $1,000. Small craft brewers may not be able to bear these costs without increasing their prices. Although craft beer offers on large chain restaurant menus are relatively few and far between, if an enticing opportunity arose for a craft brewer to sell its beer at such a place, it would miss that chance if it could not provide the required information to the restaurant. It is not yet clear what liability a brewer may have for providing erroneous information in this regard, but to avoid unnecessary risks brewers will need to ensure their data is accurate. And consumers of craft beer may end up eating (drinking?) the cost.

©2026 Bowditch & Dewey LLP. All Rights Reserved.

©2026 Bowditch & Dewey LLP. All Rights Reserved.