



INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE  
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## **DAYS NUMBERED FOR ‘PAPSAKKE’ AND INFERIOR PLASTIC WINE CONTAINERS**

### **Papsak one**

In one of the most profound steps to curb alcohol abuse in South Africa, the South African Wine and Brandy Company yesterday (15 June) announced plans to outlaw the selling of cheap, low-quality wine in foil bags (“papsakke”) and inferior plastic containers. According to Dr Johan van Rooyen, chief executive of the South African Wine and Brandy Company (SAWB), these containers could be made illegal in from as early as July next year.

“The industry has taken a firm stand against the selling of wine to consumers in substandard and improper containers,” says Van Rooyen. “And the ‘papsak’ culture should be eradicated from South African society altogether. Not only has the availability of wine in foil and inferior plastic containers contributed to alcohol abuse and social disintegration – especially among low income and rural communities – but the continued presence of this packaging has damaged and continues to damage the reputation and integrity of South Africa’s wine industry.”

Van Rooyen says that the SAWB, which represents all components of the local wine industry including labour, producers, distribution and marketing, has formed a workgroup from various industry representatives to thrash out a plan and timeframe for banning ‘papsakke’ and substandard plastic containers. “The SAWB not only has the support of the industry in this mission, but also that of local and national government who are aware of the situation with regards to the role these containers play in alcohol abuse and social breakdown,” he says.

Some 48 million litres of wine is sold in ‘papsakke’ on the locally. This represents close to 17% of the total South African domestic wine market.

A SAWB working group led by André Matthee (Executive Manager, Regulatory Services), recommends that the sale of liquor products in foil bags be prohibited via the Trade Metrology Act of 1973.

This can be accomplished by determining that –

- (a) a liquor product may only be prepackaged in a self-supporting container; or
- (b) if filled in a container which is not self-supporting, such container shall -
  - (i) be prepackaged in a self-supporting, non-returnable outer packaging, which completely encloses that container;
  - (ii) be equipped with a sealed, tamper-proof, stay fresh tap, which can be used in conjunction with the outer packaging;
  - (iii) after filling, have an oxygen permeability not exceeding 0,25 cubic centimetres of oxygen per 24 hour period at a temperature of 23° Celsius in an atmosphere with a relative humidity of 50 %; and
  - (iv) have a capacity of not more than 5 litres.

A self-supporting container/packaging can be defined as "a container/packaging, which retains its original or assembled shape irrespective of whether it is filled or empty".

Above-mentioned containers/outer packaging, with the exclusion of glass containers, must indicate a filling date, which can be prescribed under the Liquor Products Act of 1989.

#### Papsak two

With regards to plastic containers, the working group recommends that plastic containers containing liquor products:

- (a) Must have a minimum shelf life of three months (same as for beer). This can be accomplished by prescribing an oxygen permeability limit in terms of the Trade Metrology Act.
- (b) Shall always indicate a filling date. This can be prescribed in terms of the Liquor Products Act of 1989.
- (c) Must be equipped with a sealed, tamper-proof cap (Trade Metrology Act).
- (d) Shall be new plastic and may not be refilled or be returnable (Trade Metrology Act).
- (e) May not have a capacity of more than 5 litres (Trade Metrology Act).

“The working group is of the opinion that the problems surrounding the packaging under discussion will eventually only be displaced if the quality of the content thereof is also addressed,” says Van Rooyen. “The industry must draft and have embodied in legislation a set of quality standards, which can be verified by way of analyses (oxygen content, alcohol content, etc.) with which all uncertified wine must comply.”

“However, it is important that the industry be involved in enforcing these regulations in a positive and pro-active way. Over and above the state's normal obligation to apply legislation, the industry must set up a self-regulating scheme to pro-actively apply such quality standards. This will not only promote the image of wine, but will also avert the so called fly-by-night operators from the industry. It will, however, make wine more expensive in the short term and increase the danger of homebrews, but will lift the market in the longer term as wine drinkers become increasingly committed to drinking quality products.”

To succeed, the government's commitment to sufficient infrastructure and manpower to monitor and enforce such quality standards in the market place and to keep illegal brews from entering the market, must be acquired.

According to Dr Chan Makan, executive director of the Industry Association for Responsible Alcohol Use (ARA), a ban on ‘papsakke’ and inferior plastic containers is long overdue and will go along way in removing the scourge of alcohol abuse, especially in low-income or unemployed communities. “Cheap wine in cheap containers makes the product a commodity and targets those people most at risk for alcohol abuse,” he says. “As a body advocating responsible alcohol use, ARA

has always supported any move to ban these containers as they are totally unacceptable – not only as a social evil, but for the damage it does to the image of wine among local and international consumers.”

### Papsak three

According to Makan, wine must be sold in aesthetically acceptable packaging, which papsakke and cheap plastic are not. “One also has to realise that because of the flimsiness of this packaging, the quality of the end-product is often hampered by oxidation and heat damage,” he says.

“Obviously there will be some objection to the outlawing of this packaging, but objectors must realise that in the long-term the benefits will outdo the negatives,” says Makan.

Ends

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