



BREWERS ASSOCIATION FACTS ABOUT DRAUGHT BEER TO-GO CANS

Cans filled and sealed upon customer request, such as Crowler® cans, are a relatively new type of take-home draught beer package that has recently become very popular. These aluminum packages are typically large volume, up to 32 ounces, and are filled with draught beer and sealed directly after by the bartender or server. This document seeks to demonstrate some of the advantages this type of packaging has for breweries and draught beer retailers, limitations it puts on draught beer quality, and best practices breweries and retailers can employ to maximize beer quality.

EVOLUTION OF THE GROWLER

Aluminum containers used for draught beer are an evolution of the glass growler and serve the same function: to allow beer drinkers to take draught beer home with them. There are some key differences in the package, the most obvious of which is that while growlers are large glass bottles, these types of packages are large aluminum cans. Like other cans, they require a specialized seamer to seal the can after filling. Seamers are typically small to medium-sized tabletop machines that are specifically designed to seam one can at a time, as opposed to one that runs on a professional canning line, seaming upwards of hundreds of cans per minute.

CLEANLINESS

Cans used in this manner are single-use containers and cannot be re-used. In order to maintain the quality of the beer being poured into it, there are some important storage and handling practices to follow.

- Empty cans should be stored upside down to keep out dust and foreign objects
- Can tops should be kept stacked and stored in a clean environment
- When moving cans, care should be taken to not dent or bend the container, especially the top lip that will be used to form a seal
- Cans should be rinsed with cold water before filling

PURGING

To assist in extending the shelf life, it may be helpful to purge the package with carbon dioxide or nitrogen before filling.



A dedicated self-closing faucet encourages safe CO₂ purging.

Working with CO₂ is a safety hazard and gas monitoring devices should be employed when working with this gas (see sidebar for more information). A nozzle typically used for compressed gas or a self-closing beer faucet can be used to purge the package; any device used for CO₂ purging should be self-closing. In this practice, CO₂ or nitrogen is blown into the empty can to displace oxygen, presumably minimizing oxygen pick-up, and improving the quality of filling. While CO₂ purging is recognized as best practice, more research is warranted to verify the effective dosing strategy with a noticeable impact on beer quality.



DRAUGHT SAFETY



High concentrations of CO₂, which displaces oxygen, can result in death in less than 15 minutes. CO₂ is colorless and odorless and should therefore be treated as a gas with poor warning properties. It is denser than air and high concentrations can persist in low, enclosed areas. Gaseous CO₂ is an asphyxiant. Concentrations of 10% by volume (100,000 ppm) or more can produce unconsciousness or death. Lower concentrations may cause headache, sweating, rapid breathing, increased heartbeat, shortness of breath, dizziness, mental depression, visual disturbances, and shaking. The seriousness of these latter symptoms is dependent on the CO₂ concentration and the length of time the individual is exposed. The response to CO₂ inhalation varies greatly between individuals.

FILLING

Local, state, and federal laws often dictate filling and selling practices, up to and including the requirements for pre-filled and/or pre-sealed packages, labeling and licensing. Retailers must be aware of and comply with all local and state filling regulations, which can vary greatly.

Follow these recommended filling steps when filling directly from the draught faucet:

- Apply any labels or writing to the package before beginning the filling process.
- Rinse with cold water being careful not to damage the lip.
- Purge with CO₂ or nitrogen.
- Insert sanitized fill tube inside faucet and the can.
- Open faucet and flow beer into the can. Do not close faucet until filling is complete as an air gap will form in the tube and cause unnecessary foaming, particularly in standard cross vent faucets.
- Fill all the way to the top of the can, ideally with 3/16" to ¼" foam on top.
- Place the lid on top, ideally on foam, and hold down firmly.
- Place can in seamer and complete the seaming process.



A growler filler can be adapted to fill draught to-go cans.

DRAUGHT SYSTEM HYGIENE

Basic hygiene begins with draught beer lines cleaned at a minimum of every two-weeks as outlined by the recommendations found in the [Brewers Association Draught Beer Quality Manual](#). Faucets and filling tubes should be rinsed, cleaned, and sanitized after each package fill and air-dried between uses.

More complex counter-pressure filling systems have a greater need for comprehensive cleaning to avoid off-flavors caused by infection. They should be cleaned at least as often as the rest of the draught system if not every night at closing. A well-designed and diligently executed maintenance plan will ensure a hygienic and trouble-free draught system operation, and fresh, flavorful beer. ■