

The First Management Systems Certification Scheme on Wine Storage is Launched in Hong Kong on 31 December 2009

The Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency (HKQAA) is pleased to announce the launching of the Wine Storage Management Systems Certification Scheme today (31 December 2009).

Since the Hong Kong Government abolished the import duty on wine in 2008, the development of Hong Kong as a regional wine trading and distribution hub has gathered further momentum. Wine-related business activities have seen robust growth. In particular, the industry is forecasting that Hong Kong is overtaking London in 2009 to become the world's second largest wine auction centre in the world, just after New York. The industry players, with their expertise and years of experience in handling wine-related business in Hong Kong, have been responding swiftly to the surge in market needs by expanding their operations. In support, HKQAA has partnered with the industry to develop a management systems certification scheme for wine storage facilities. This scheme is the first of its kind in the region, if not the world. Not only was the idea of having such a scheme championed by the industry itself, local industrial experts have contributed a great deal to the process leading to promulgation of the scheme. Many of them serve on the Technical Committee of WSMS whose responsibilities include providing guidance in drafting and finalizing the specifications for certification. Their expertise has been particularly valuable to HKQAA when drawing up specifications which will help ensure that Hong Kong's certified facilities offer conditions which, according to the key players in the wine industry, would be comparable to the very best international practices for the proper cellaring, storage and warehousing of wines in Hong Kong.

In finalizing the specifications, HKQAA executives took a study mission in October 2009 and visited different wine storage facilities and wine producers in the United States, United Kingdom and France to understand more about overseas operations in the wine industry. A number of them were invited to become general advisors to HKQAA to comment on the status of the industry in their respective countries. This information is used from time to time as background to ensure that our own specifications are at the very least comparable to the best international practices.

HKQAA is privileged to have worked together with the wine industry to launch the WSMS. We hope it would prove its worth by helping to ensure industry standards which in turn will protect Hong Kong's consumers and wine collectors by certifying only those facilities that comply with a comprehensive list of requirements.

The certification requirements are developed on the basis of the globally accepted international good management practices, having regard to the best practices in wine storage. The certification process follows a well proven and internationally recognized methodology that gives an objective and impartial attestation of the ability of management systems to deliver wine storage services that fulfill certain standards.

For the purpose of launching the Wine Storage Management Systems Certification Scheme, HKQAA has compiled a handbook. It provides the details of requirements and reference materials for the certification of wine storage management systems by two categories, namely (a) 'Fine Wine Storage Management Systems Certification' intended for wines that require long term storage; and (b) 'Commercial Wine Storage Management Systems Certification' for wines that are produced primarily for consumption in the near future.

More specifically, the certification requirements consist of two parts: (a) the 'System Requirements'; and (b) a 'Code of Practice'. The Code of Practice defines the requirements in nine aspects including temperature, humidity, lights, vibration, maintenance, security, inventory management, hygiene and insurance. For the warehousing of wines that are produced for consumption in the near future, certain flexibilities have been allowed in some of the specifications in the Code of Practice. Whereas the same set of system requirements is applied to both categories of certification that encompass the planning, execution, monitoring and improvement of wine storage services. Practitioners managing wine storage facilities are required to establish management systems by defining their policies, performance indicators and wine storage management plans; implement the plans with adequate resources; monitor effectiveness after implementation; and make adjustments to their systems and plans so as to maintain competitiveness.

The handbook also provides an outline of the application process leading to certification. Practitioners managing wine storage facilities may make use of the reference materials in the handbook to establish their management systems before forwarding their applications to HKQAA. In their applications, they should indicate the storage locations and the category of certification opted for. Once an application is accepted, an assessment of management system documentation will be arranged. Feedback will be given to specify whether adequate details have been documented by the applicants or not. When the applicants have implemented their management systems for at least 3 months, storage conditions measurement and on-site management system assessment will be arranged. Once an applicant is able to demonstrate that his/her management system fulfills the certification requirements in full, a recommendation for certification will be made by an assessment team. The recommendation will then be ratified by a Certification Review Board. After certification, the successful applicants are entitled to use HKQAA's wine storage management systems certification labels for the purpose of marketing/promoting their wine storage services that fall within the scope of certification.

In launching the scheme, we are keenly conscious of the challenges that we in HKQAA must face up to, after the Chief Executive announced in his latest Policy Address the initiative to develop and promote Hong Kong's testing and certification industry, one of the six new economic areas identified by the Task Force on Economic Challenges where Hong Kong enjoys clear advantages.

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HKQAA Background

A non-profit-distributing organization established by the Hong Kong Government in 1989, Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency (HKQAA) is one of the leading conformity assessment bodies in Hong Kong to assist industry and commerce in the development of management systems.