

## **GALLO FINDS WINERY TAINTED WITH TCA**

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Gallo of Sonoma's Healdsburg **winery** is tainted with low levels of **TCA**, a troublesome chemical related to mold that gives wines a musty smell reminiscent of dank basements or wet newspapers.

**TCA** poses no health risks to wine drinkers, but at elevated levels it affects the aroma and taste of wine. And once **TCA** invades a **winery**, getting rid of it can pose a significant problem.

"We currently have low levels of **TCA** at our **winery** in Sonoma County. We are getting a better understanding of this issue and are working to drive the **TCA** down to non-detectable levels," Mary Wagner, chief technology officer at Gallo headquarters in Modesto, said Thursday.

Gallo, the world's second-largest wine company, is publicly confronting the **TCA** issue, first raised by the Wine Spectator magazine after a yearlong investigation of tainted Gallo wines. **TCA** or 2,4,6 trichloranisol, is the same chemical compound responsible for the bad flavors in wines with cork problems.

**TCA** is not a problem peculiar to Gallo. Two other **wineries**, including Beaulieu Vineyards in Napa Valley and Hanzell Vineyards in Sonoma County, have acknowledged having **TCA** in their wines and winemaking facilities.

"**TCA** problems are industry-wide. Any **winery** that uses cork or practices traditional winemaking with wood barrels must deal with this," said Gladys Horiuchi, communications director for the Wine Institute, which represents more than 650 California **wineries**.

**TCA** is the chemical byproduct of the interaction between mold and chlorine, which is used as a cleaning solution in **wineries** and as a washing agent for natural corks.

"Wood, mold and chlorine are the magic combination that creates this problem," Wagner said. Once **TCA** is in a **winery**, it can be expensive and time consuming to eliminate. Hanzell **Winery** spent \$500,000 on new equipment to control **TCA**.

Wagner said sophisticated laboratory tests showed trace amounts of **TCA** in random lots of its wines produced at the Healdsburg facility. The sprawling **winery** in the Dry Creek Valley produces more than 2 million cases a year, bottling such Gallo labels as Frei Bros., Rancho Zabaco and MacMurray Ranch, as well as the Gallo of Sonoma brand.

But because it's not a health issue, Gallo has not recalled any of the tainted wines. Wagner said lab tests showed the average level of **TCA** in the Gallo wines is 1.9 parts per trillion (ppt), the equivalent of one second in 320 centuries.

"There is no reason to recall the wines because most consumers can't even taste or smell it. Our consumers have never brought it to our attention," Wagner said.

At 1.9 ppt, most people would not be able to smell or taste the **TCA** in wine, said Susan Langstaff, a sensory scientist with Vinquiry, a wine analysis company with laboratories in Napa and Sonoma counties.

But people vary in their ability to detect **TCA** in wine. Some can detect it at levels of 1 ppt.

Langstaff said the general threshold is 7 ppt before the average consumer can detect the musty aroma or taste the dank earthy flavor of wine tainted with **TCA**.

The Wine Spectator has been investigating Gallo's wines since 2002. Spectator wine critic James Laube detected **TCA**'s telltale musty aroma and chalky, bitter flavors in Gallo wines and sent the wines to be analyzed by an independent lab. Tests of 20 bottles showed all the wines had **TCA**, with an average level of 3 ppt, according to the magazine.

The magazine relayed the information to Gallo officials. Wagner said a concerted effort to clean up **TCA** at the Healdsburg **winery** has cut the levels of **TCA**, with a goal of getting the levels to zero.

Marty Bannister, owner of Vinquiry, said sophisticated analytical testing of wine keeps raising the bar.

“**TCA** is a significant issue that weighs on our minds as wines become better and better made with fewer defects,” he said. “Those musty type of aromas from **TCA** mold contamination become more apparent at lower levels.”

The Wine Institute's technical committee has been studying the **TCA** issue for years and brings winemakers together to exchange ideas, information and experiences.