



Tea Board India
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Circular

In order to establish a uniform and standardized procedure for drawing representative tea samples from various sources — such as manufacturers, warehouses, auction centers, retailers, etc. and to ensure compliance with the quality parameters laid down by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been prepared.

This SOP is issued under the relevant provisions of the Tea Act and allied Control Orders and is required to be strictly followed by all concerned involved in tea sampling, inspection, and quality control processes ***with immediate effect.***

The objective is to ensure consistency, transparency, and reliability in the sampling process for the effective enforcement of quality standards and regulatory compliance.

This issue with the approval of Competent Authority

Controller of Licensing

Distribution:

Executive Director, Tea Board, Coonoor	For kind information and wider circulation amongst the Board's offices and associations of the industry
Executive Director, Tea Board, Guwahati	
DDTD, Tea Board, Siliguri	For compliance.
Special Officer (NWI), New Delhi	
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All Tea Producer Associations	
All Tea Exporter Associations	
All Tea Buyer Associations	
Tea Broker Association	
All Auction Organisers	
All Tea Warehouse Associations	For uploading in the Board's website.
System Analyst, Tea Board	

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for drawing of tea samples for checking compliance with Food Safety Standards

1. Purpose

To define the standardized procedure for drawing representative tea samples from various sources (e.g., factories, warehouses, buyer premises, export and import consignments, auction centers, etc) for the purpose of checking conformity with FSSAI standards through laboratory testing.

2. Scope

This SOP applies to the procedure of drawing all varieties of made tea samples (both bulk and packet teas) for quality assessment and regulatory compliance under Tea Board guidelines and applicable food safety norms.

3. Regulatory Provisions

- Paragraphs 27, 28 & 29 of the Tea (Marketing) Control Order, 2003 (TMCO, 2003) (to be read in conjunction with Tea Board's circular Ref. No. 8(9)/LC/Sampling/2019/96/651 dated 2nd June, 2022)
- Paragraph 35 of the Tea (Distribution & Export) Control Order, 2005 (TDECO, 2005)
- Paragraph 15 of the Tea Warehouses (Licensing) Order, 1989 (TWLO, 1989)

4. Types of Samples

a) Regulatory samples

Regulatory samples are tea samples drawn by or under the authority of the Licensing/Regulatory Authority for the purpose of compliance monitoring. These samples are analysed to determine conformity with FSSAI norms or any other rules or guidelines in force at that time. In case the analysis yields an adverse result, necessary actions may be initiated under the provisions of the Tea Act, the relevant Control Orders or any other applicable rules, regulations, or guidelines in force at the time.

b) Surveillance Samples

Surveillance samples are tea samples drawn solely for the purpose of monitoring, surveillance, data collection, or research. The results obtained from analysis of these samples shall not be used for initiating any legal or regulatory action under the Tea Act, Control Orders, or any other applicable laws, rules, or guidelines in force.

5. Materials and Equipment Required

- Spoons, scoops, borers or any other related instruments
- Aluminium foil
- Packing machine (if available at the premises)
- BOPP Brown Tape at least 2-3-inch-wide
- Heat Sealing Machine
- Brass seal with Tea Board imprint
- Sealing wax, candle, match box
- Needle and Thread
- Adhesive, Scissors, pens, etc.

6. Procedure for drawing of samples

The following procedure should be adopted for drawing tea samples, whether Regulatory or Surveillance in nature, unless specifically mentioned. In addition to these steps, all concerned should strictly adhere to the conditions prescribed under the relevant provisions of the Control Orders, as referenced in Point No. 3 of this document.

a) Bulk Teas

- i. Sampling points shall be selected based on one or more of the following criteria:
 - Routine inspections carried out as per the scheduled monitoring plan
 - Complaints received from stakeholders or consumers regarding quality or safety concerns
 - Random checks or surveillance initiated to assess general compliance
 - Previous non-compliance history of units or locations
 - Any other criteria applicable at that time
- ii. The invoice(s) from which samples are to be drawn—whether for **local sale, export, or import**—shall be identified based on the purpose of sampling. Samples should be strictly drawn from packed teas for which invoices have already been prepared.

- iii. After identification of the invoice(s), the details of the lot (containing multiple packages) as mentioned in the invoice shall be matched with the physical stock of teas.

Note: If a sample is drawn from at least one package of the lot, the drawn sample shall be deemed to be representative of the entire lot as specified in the selected invoice, unless otherwise stated.

- iv. Samples to be drawn either from the entire lot (all packages) or from (selective packages within the lot, depending on the purpose and nature of the inspection.
- v. Size of the sample- 500 grams in weight per set in 3 (three) sets (both for regulatory and surveillance sample)
- vi. The drawn samples shall be collected in clean, dry and odour free aluminum foils (food grade) of appropriate size and should be properly sealed with tamper proof materials like brown tape, etc. or heat sealed.
- vii. The sealed aluminum foils should be clearly labeled with a unique sample code and type of tea and must bear the signature of the inspecting official. It is to be ensured that no identifying details of the tea owner are mentioned on the sample packets, in order to maintain anonymity during analysis.
- viii. Out of the three sets of samples collected, one set shall be handed over to the owner of the tea or to their duly authorized representative, against proper acknowledgment **(Please refer to the attached format at SI No. 7).**
- ix. The bag from which the sample has been drawn shall then be properly re-sealed with brown adhesive tape or any other tamper proof material to avoid any tampering. It shall also be appropriately labeled with counter signatures of both the parties.
- x. After re-sealing, the entire lot corresponding to the concerned invoice no. from which the sample has been drawn shall be placed under seizure (applicable only for Regulatory Samples). The seized tea must be stored separately within the unit and marked prominently to avoid inadvertent mixing or release of the teas.
- xi. A proper seizure memo **(Please refer to the attached format at SI No. 7)** should be prepared, indicating the details of the lot, quantity, invoice number, reason for seizure, date and time of seizure, and the signatures of the authorized officials and the representative of the unit.

The seized stock shall remain under the custody of the unit but must not be tampered with, moved, or released without prior written permission from the Competent Authority of the Board.

b) Packet Teas

- i. Samples shall be collected from retail markets (e.g., retail shops, malls, local markets, etc.)
- ii. Packet teas of different companies shall be purchased from markets with specific batch numbers.
- iii. Size of the sample- Packets of 500 grams in weight per set in 2 (two) sets (both for regulatory and surveillance sample) with same batch number.
- iv. After purchasing, the content of the packet tea should be packed in clean, dry and odour-free aluminum foils of appropriate size and should be properly sealed with tamper proof materials like brown tape, etc. or heat sealed.
- v. The sealed aluminum foils should be clearly labeled with a unique sample code and type of tea and must bear the signature of the inspecting official. It is to be ensured that no identifying details of the tea owner are mentioned on the sample packets, in order to maintain anonymity during analysis.
- vi. In case of packet tea, the original empty packet (from which the sample was made) shall be preserved in good condition until all legal, administrative or analytical proceedings based on the analysis of the sample are fully completed.

7. Formats for collection of sample and seizure of tea

The following formats are to be used for collection of samples, handover of samples and seizure of teas”:

Regulatory Samples

- i. Annexure A
- ii. Annexure B
- iii. Annexure C
- iv. Annexure D/E/F as the case may be

Surveillance Samples

- i. Annexure A
- ii. Annexure B
- iii. Annexure C

8. Distribution of sample:

The drawn samples shall be distributed in the following manner, whether Regulatory or Surveillance, for analysis at an NABL accredited empanelled laboratories of Tea Board to check compliance with FSSAI norms or any other applicable rules or guidelines in force:

- i. Out of the two sets of samples remaining, one set shall be handed over to an NABL accredited empanelled laboratories of Tea Board for carrying out analysis as per FSSAI norms or any other applicable rules or guidelines in force.
- ii. The second set of sample shall be kept under the custody of Tea Board as a backup sample or reference sample for addressing any dispute, litigation, etc at a future date.

Note: The set of sample handed over to the laboratory should not bear any particulars of the owner of tea in order to maintain anonymity, ensure transparency and uphold the accuracy and impartiality of the test results.

9. Timeline for dispatch of tea sample:

- i. All samples designated for laboratory analysis must be dispatched as early as possible, ideally on the same day the sample is drawn.
- ii. Under no circumstances, the sample shall be dispatched later than 48 hours after the sampling is completed, excluding weekends, public holidays.
- iii. Delays beyond 48 hours are permitted only under exceptional circumstances, which must be documented with a valid justification and approved by the Licensing Authority or Registering Authority.

This SOP shall come into force with immediate effect.

Sample Code:

The specimen impression of the seal used by me to seal the sample(s) described below is sent herewith:

PARTICULARS OF THE SAMPLES

- a) Serial Number of the sample :
- b) Name and designation of the collecting officer :
- c) Name of the Owner and Registration Certificate / Licence number held under the Tea (Distribution & Export) Control Order, 2005: /Tea Marketing (Control) Order, 2003
- d) Place of collection of sample :
- e) Date of collection :
- f) Proprietary or other trade mark stamped on each chest / bag. :
- g) Number on the chest / bag (if any) :
- h) Nature of article submitted for analysis :

SPECIMEN IMPRESSION OF THE SEAL USED

1)

2)

3)

Date.....

Signature

Designation of the Officer
Collecting the sample

Sample Code:

DECLARATION

I.....the owner /
the representative of the Warehouse/Tea Factory/Lorry/ Godown,etc.from which
samples have on this day been drawn by Shri
.....
..... an officer of Tea Board, hereby declare that the lot involved consists of
..... chests/bags of Tea containing in all Kgs of Tea
approximately and that the samples drawn are representatives of the lot.

Place.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Name.....

Manager / Proprietor /Partner/ Authorized Representative

Annexure-C

To,

Tea Board,

.....
.....

Sample Code:

Dear Sir/Madam,

Shri Inspecting
Official, Tea Board, Kolkata, has visited our Warehouse/Tea Factory/Lorry/ Godown,
etc on He has drawn gms of samples from the graded
tea of
M/s.....

... At the time of his inspection bags / chests
involving quantity of Kgs oftea under Invoice
No..... dated of the aforesaid
factory/importer/exporter/buyer,etc. were stored in our **Warehouse/Tea
Factory/Lorry/ Godown,etc.**

The samples were supplied at free of cost to the officers of the Board and the
samples were taken in the presence of warehouse management.

Yours faithfully,

Name & Signature

Manager / Owner/Proprietor /Partner/ Authorized Representative

Received the following:

1. Declaration Form.
2. 1 mo. of Sample packet of 500 gms duly packed, sealed with sample form.

Sample Code:

TEA BOARD

(See Clause 27,28 & 29 of the Tea Marketing (Control) Order, 2003)

Whereas it appears to me that you have kept Tea in premises of
M/s.....
.....

Now, therefore, I seize it and hereby direct you to keep in your safe custody the said
sealed stock about Kgs/ bags subject to such order as may subsequently be
issued in relation thereto. TEA BOARD do not hold themselves liable for any claim for rent
or any other charges or for any loss you may sustain for the Tea seized, and handed over to
you for safe custody.

Place..... Signature.....
Date.....
Designation.....

WITNESS

1)
(Name)

.....
(Address)

.....
(Signature)

2)
(Name)

.....
(Address)

.....
(Signature)

Received the original of the above, I have read the contents and agree to abide by it.

.....
.....

Sample Code:

TEA BOARD

(See Clause 35 & 29 of the Tea (Distribution & Export) Control Order, 2005)

Whereas it appears to me that you have kept Tea in premises of
M/s.....
.....

Now, therefore, I seize it and hereby direct you to keep in your safe custody the said
sealed stock about Kgs/ bags subject to such order as may subsequently be
issued in relation thereto. TEA BOARD do not hold themselves liable for any claim for rent
or any other charges or for any loss you may sustain for the Tea seized, and handed over to
you for safe custody.

Place.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Designation.....

WITNESS

1)
(Name)

.....
(Address)

.....
(Signature)

2)
(Name)

.....
(Address)

.....
(Signature)

Received the original of the above, I have read the contents and agree to abide by it.

.....
.....

Sample Code:

(See Clause 15 (iv) under the Tea Warehouses (Licensing) Order, 1989)

TEA BOARD

Whereas it appears to me that you have been in contravention of clause of the Tea Warehouses (Licensing) Order, 1989, carrying on the activities of storing/blending/packaging or tea in premises No.....

Now, therefore, I seize the tea/tea product and hereby direct you to keep in your safe custody the said sealed stock of about Kilos/Chests/Bags subject to such order as may subsequently be issued in relaxation thereto. The Board do not hold themselves liable for any claim for rent or any other charges or for any loss you may sustain for the tea seized and handed over to you for safe custody.

Place

Date

Signature.....

Designation.....

Witness

1. _____ (Name)
_____ (Address)
_____ (Signature)

2. _____ (Name)
_____ (Address)
_____ (Signature)

Received the original of the above, I have read the contents and agree to abide by it.