

# Uttar Pradesh distilleries can now produce absolute alcohol

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PILIBHIT: In a first, distilleries in Uttar Pradesh will be given permission to start production of absolute alcohol of pharma grade from 2022-23 cane crushing season, said Sanjay R Bhoosreddy, additional chief secretary of sugarcane and sugar industry. "At present, the state is dependent on the US, Australia and China for the pharma grade alcohol. The move may pave the way for self-reliance," he said.

UP currently imports about 50 lakh litres of absolute alcohol to meet local demand. The state cabinet passed an order on April 20 allowing granting of permission for production of absolute alcohol, which refers to pure ethanol with absolutely no water content. It is usually used by chemistry, bio-chemistry labs, medical research & forensic labs, as well the chemical and pharma industries.

The state government has approved a total of 94 distilleries, including 84 functional with annual production capacity of 25 lakh kilo litres. "Our prime objective is to first fulfil local requirements of absolute alcohol and then increase its production depending on demand from other states. UP will generate incidental revenue to the tune of Rs 10 crore from production of absolute alcohol," he said.

Any distillery using sugarcane, potato or vegetables as raw material could produce absolute alcohol, Bhoosreddy said.

"The fact that absolute alcohol production in the state is nil despite abundance of sugarcane, molasses and adequate number of distilleries came to the notice of the government when an application for import licence was filed by a commercial group. On enquiring, it was found that there was no such provision for granting of permission for its production. This policy gap has now been bridged," Bhoosreddy said.

Terming 'absolute alcohol' as 'dry ethanol of pharma grade with purity of 99.98%', a senior distillery expert welcomed the government's move, but cautioned that mills should embark on the new venture only after assessment of its viability.

"The production process of dry ethanol will require setting up of a HPLC (high-performance liquid chromatography) plant -- the cost of which and the total investment required are not known to us at present. Considering UP's current demand for dry ethanol, such a project can be profitable for one or two distilleries and not for all functional units," the expert said. It may be noted that UP is the largest producer of ethanol in the country. The state government is promoting ethanol production under the Ethanol Augmentation Scheme of the central government.