

Tip of the Week

December 27, 2004



Congeners





Editors Note: This started out as an article about dioxin and furan congeners. While doing the research, however, I Googled my way into something that is probably more helpful to most stack testers, and fits the holiday season a little better than a dry discussion about organic chemistry.

Congeners are toxic substances created during the alcohol fermentation process. When you drink alcohol, these toxins are dispersed into your system as your liver breaks down the alcohol. While congeners are not the sole cause of a hangover, they do seem to contribute in some manner to the “quality” of the ensuing hangover.

Knowing something about the level of congeners in your chosen alcoholic beverage may help you determine how ill it can make you. In general, the fermentation and distillation processes determine the amount of congeners in the end product. Lower levels of congeners may mean a kinder, gentler hangover. . . if there is such a thing.

More expensive alcohol generally contains fewer congeners because it undergoes a more rigorous distillation process that filters out a higher percentage of the congeners. (Certain liquors may actually be distilled three or four times.)

Darker colored drinks, such as whiskey, brandy and red wine have more congeners than lighter drinks such as vodka, gin and white wine. Beer falls somewhere in the middle of all of this...although the color of beer is no indicator of its level of congeners; they're all about the same in this respect.

	Amount of Congeners
Vodka	
Gin	
Scotch	
Brandy/Rum	
Bourbon	