

The First Management Systems Certification Scheme on Wine Storage is about to Launch in Hong Kong

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 here. In support, the Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency (HKQAA) has partnered with the industry to develop a management systems certification scheme, with a view to certifying that our commercial and long term fine wine storage facilities meet certain standards – which according to the key players in the wine industry, should be alongside or even better than those of the facilities available internationally. This scheme is the first of its kind in the region, if not the world.

Development of HKQAA's Wine Storage Management Systems Certification Scheme (WSMS) is nearing completion. HKQAA expects to promulgate the scheme before the end of 2009 and invite applications. 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, according to the key players in the wine industry, 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 the 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

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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. 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.