

The True Meaning of AFNOR

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Authorised Distributor for Young
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The acronym, AFNOR, is seen on bottles of Young Living Essential Oils and on no other brand of essential oils in North America. YLEO oils are sold as therapeutic grade. However, there seems to be some confusion as to the meaning of therapeutic grade oils and how such oils relate to AFNOR. In fact, I have been confused myself and have previously held some misconceptions on the matter. I hope that the information that follows here will clarify things for you, as it has for me. The following article has been reviewed for accuracy by personnel at AFNOR in France as well as Young Living Essential Oils in Utah.

What is AFNOR?

AFNOR (Association Francaise de Normalization) was founded in 1926 and is a French government-approved organization under the administrative supervision of the French Ministry for Industry. It has a membership of approximately 3,000 companies. Under a decree of January 26, 1984, AFNOR controls the central standardization system of the country of France. AFNOR consists of 31 standardization fices, public authorities, and 20,000 experts.

AFNOR acts as a standards-setting body for a variety of products and services. They are an agency which sets minimum standards by which quality, safety, reliability, and performance requirements described in French, European, and International Standards can be validated.

This is not the same as certification of a product or service. The act of certification designates that a recognized body, independent of the interested parties, gives written assurance that a product, process, or service conforms to specified requirements. Hence, AFNOR, itself, does not certify essential oils. AFNOR standards for essential oils are only reference documents used by professional and commercial buyers and sellers to gauge their conformance to standards set and agreed upon by the participating parties. There is no official AFNOR certification for oils at this time.

The person in charge of AFNOR standards for essential oils is Bernadette Ruetsche, who reviewed and edited this article for accuracy. She can be reached via email at [<bernadette.ruetsch@afnor.org>](mailto:bernadette.ruetsch@afnor.org).

The AFNOR postal address is: Association Francaise de Normalisation (AFNOR), 11 Avenue Francis de Pressense, 93571 Saint-Dennis La Plaine Cedex, France. Their phone number is 33 (0) 1-41-62-88-87. Their fax is 33 (0) 49-17-90-00. The AFNOR website is [<www.afnor.fr>](http://www.afnor.fr). It is in both English and French.

What is ISO?

The ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies drawn from 130 countries. It was established in 1974. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It is a nongovernmental body with a

mission to promote worldwide standardization among the products and services of international commerce. Its aim is to facilitate the global exchange of goods and services as well as to develop scientific, technological, and economic activity among nations. AFNOR represents France as a member of the ISO.

The ISO website is <www.iso.org>. Their postal address is: International Organization for Standardization (ISO), 1, rue de Varembé, Case postale 56, CH-1211, Geneva 20, Switzerland. Their telephone is 41-22-749-01-11. Their fax is 41-22-733-34-30. They have several email addresses depending on the department you wish to contact. These are given on their website, which is in English.

The ISO hosts 214 technical committees to set standards for a variety of products and practices. Technical Committee, TC #54, is the one designated to deal with essential oil standards, which includes not only essential oil composition, but packaging, storage, sampling methodology, and even the laboratory procedures approved for oil analyses. The ISO committee on essential oils was primarily set up for the food, fragrance, and cosmetics industries in order to insure similarity of products. There are 15 countries represented on TC #54, including the United States. The chairman of the committee is from Spain. They meet every other year.

Thus, the ISO, as well as AFNOR, sets standards for many items in a variety of areas, not just essential oils. For example, the international symbols you see on automobile dashboards, in airports, and in other public places all over the world were set by the ISO. The ISO standards for essential oils are the same as those for AFNOR.

Does AFNOR or ISO Test Oils?

AFNOR and ISO have no laboratories and do not do any testing themselves. They only set standards as agreed upon by the industries involved. An AFNOR or ISO designation on a packaging label for an essential oil does not mean it has been approved directly by AFNOR or ISO. It only means that a laboratory, independent of the interested parties, has tested the oil and found that it falls within the compositional profile designated by the AFNOR/ISO standard for that oil.

At this time, AFNOR standards for essential oils deal only with the few chemical components of importance to the flavor and fragrance industry. AFNOR/ISO standards for essential oils deals only with the chemistry of the finished oil and not with how the oil was derived.

Furthermore, it includes only the most prevalent compounds of the oil--those of interest to the perfume and food industry. It does not address the hundreds of minor and trace components of a natural oil that are necessary to its therapeutic properties. An essential oil could be devoid of most of its healing compounds and still pass AFNOR standards.

A typical AFNOR/ISO standard usually consists a statement of minimum concentrations of only the five or six compounds that provide taste and/or aroma. In some cases, there may be only one compound of interest to define the standard for a species of oil-- like the menthol in peppermint (*Mentha piperita*). Thus, the hundreds of healing compounds that comprise a therapeutic grade of oil are not considered at all. Hence, AFNOR/ISO standards simply do not address the therapeutic aspects of an oil. An oil that tests within AFNOR parameters only means that the oil fits a certain minimum chemical profile set by the industry, which is predominantly for food and cosmetics.

What is a Therapeutic Grade Essential Oil?

According to Young Living, besides a chemical profile that includes as many of its natural ingredients as possible, what makes an essential oil therapeutic has even more to do with how it is derived. It must be grown organically (or wildcrafted), distilled at minimum pressure and temperature in vessels of non-reactive materials, and bottled unchanged, unrefined, and unadulterated. It is these latter aspects that make YLEO oils therapeutic.

An oil could fulfill all the AFNOR/ISO criteria and not be therapeutic. In fact, many commercial oils do. Unfortunately, the existence of AFNOR/ISO standards, such as they are, causes many companies, who wish to sell their oils to the food or fragrance industries, to compound, manipulate, refine, denature, and adulterate oils to make them comply with the standard. Hence, the appearance of AFNOR on a label does not prove its therapeutic quality nor does the absence of AFNOR indicate that an oil is not therapeutic.

Dr. Herve Casabianca (along with 34 other experts) is a member of the French national committee on essential oil standards. Dr. Casabianca spoke at a Young Living Convention in Salt Lake City several years ago. Dr. Casabianca represents the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). He agrees with the YLEO definition of a therapeutic grade essential oil. No individual can afford to test for the hundreds of compounds in the oils they use. And even if an individual were to have an oil tested, Casabianca pointed out that commercial chemists are very clever in their schemes to fool laboratories and with a standard as minimal as AFNOR/ISO, they can usually make a synthetic or adulterated oil look natural when it is not.

Radioactive Analysis as a Test for Naturalness:

In his laboratory at CNRS, Casabianca said that they test for radon. Radon is a radioactive gas that is constantly released through the soil from the nuclear decay of minerals in the bedrocks below. A natural oil will contain traces of radon. An oil synthesized in a laboratory will not contain radon. Thus, they can sometimes identify a synthetic or manipulated oil containing only the few key ingredients to pass the AFNOR test from a natural one that would contain all the other ingredients. However, radon is not a customary element

looked for in testing for AFNOR compliance because it is too expensive and most laboratories do not have the necessary apparatus.

Even so, according to Bernadette Ruetsche, speaking for AFNOR-- With AFNOR/ISO standards it is possible to attest to a high degree of certainty as to the purity of oils because the AFNOR-adopted quantities of components correspond to those found in natural products. Hence, according to AFNOR authorities, if an essential oil fits AFNOR/ISO standards, it is generally considered to have come from a natural source.

What AFNOR Does Not Include:

Testing for compositional compliance with AFNOR/ISO standards does not include testing for traces of pesticides, herbicides, or allergens. If an organic farm is next to one that uses chemicals, the wind can contaminate the soil and air of the organic farm. It is possible for a certified organic crop to contain traces of pollutants and still pass as certified organic. If an essential oil distributing company wants to be sure its oils contain no such contaminants, it would need to test specifically for them. An AFNOR designation does not address these issues.

Neither does AFNOR address the issue of high-temperature, high-pressure distillation, which destroys many of the therapeutic ingredients while preserving those of interest to perfumers and/or companies that employ flavors from oils. AFNOR also does not address the issue of petrochemical contaminants in oils extracted by strong solvents.

Dr. Casabianca concluded that in the end, no matter how much you analyze an oil in a laboratory, based on the analysis alone, you cannot always be sure whether it is completely natural and therapeutic or not. To test every oil sample to a certainty would be economically prohibitive. You can determine if it fulfills AFNOR/ISO standards by simple laboratory techniques, available and possible throughout France and in most countries worldwide, but such a test will not ascertain that an oil has healing properties.

Casabianca said the best measure is to know your grower, know your distiller, know your bottler, and know your distributor. It is a matter of trust, he said. He said that YLEO is the only North American company that routinely sends samples of its oils to France for testing against AFNOR/ISO standards and that he has always been impressed with the high quality of oils sent by YLEO.

Summary of Key Points:

- 1 There is no nationally or internationally recognized agency that sets standards for therapeutic grade essential oils. Neither AFNOR, ISO, CODEX, or any other agency does that.
- 2 Therapeutic grade has not only to do with the chemical composition of the oil, but also with its origin--how and where grown, how distilled, as well as how packaged and distributed. AFNOR and ISO do not

consider these factors, which are crucial in the determination and maintenance of therapeutic grade properties.

So What's an Essential Oiler to Do?

With respect to any particular oil or brand of oils, the question you need to ask is this: Do you obtain therapeutic results with that brand of essential oils or not? The proof is in the healing that results--a factor anyone can experience, observe, recognize, and document for themselves. No laboratory test is needed for that. This is anyone's prerogative, and it is available to you at no cost.

As for YLEO oils, those of us who use them know of their authentic healing power first hand. We have seen it and we have experienced it repeatedly. We don't need AFNOR, ISO, or any other test for that.

So, are Young Living oils therapeutic grade? You can answer this for yourself. I know they are, not because they are designated as AFNOR, but because I have seen and experienced their healing power over and over again. I need no other proof. Your personal experience is more valid than any lab test, however scientific.

A USP/NF Postscript:

Until recently, there were no American standards for essential oils. Young living scientists are currently working with the United States Pharmacopeia and National Formulary (USP/ NF) which are American standard setting organizations that have been around for more than a century. As recently as one year ago USP/NF had virtually remained uninvolved in establishing standards for essential oils. That is now rapidly changing as of the Spring 2005 Pharmacopeial Forum. Standards for essential oils are now being established by the joint efforts of various industries (including pharmaceutical), various government groups (including the FDA), as well as university scientists and consultants who know what standards for therapeutic grade oils should be--including authorities from Young Living.

USP/NF standards go beyond AFNOR/ISO in that the latter concern themselves only with a chemical profile in the finished oil while USP/NF also specifies the manner in which the herbs are grown, cultivated, and harvested, as well as how the oils are distilled, extracted, bottled, and labeled.

In other words, if things work out the way they should, an essential oil that qualifies to be designated as a USP/NF grade oil will not only fit a minimum chemical profile (like AFNOR/ISO), but will also fit the definition of a therapeutic grade oil, as defined by YLEO. Hence, at some time in the future, we can expect to see aromatic oils that carry the designation of USP/NF on their labels which will have valid meaning in defining a therapeutic grade oil, whereas AFNOR does not.