



Bottle Bills Impact Curbside Recycling Programs

NATIONAL WASTE & RECYCLING ASSOCIATION



“Bottle bills,” also known as container deposit legislation or deposit return systems (DRS), are systems where consumers pay deposits—typically 5 or 10 cents—when purchasing beverages that come in metal, glass and plastic beverage containers. Some expanded bottle bills also include other beverage categories such as energy drinks and iced teas, but milk is typically excluded. The deposit is refunded when the container is returned.

Bottle Bill Origins

Most states instituted bottle bills as litter abatement programs before curbside recycling was initiated and are used in 10 states: California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon and Vermont.

While states with bottle bills have a beverage container recycling rate of 60% to 70%, this does not necessarily translate into high overall recycling rates. For example, in 2019, Michigan had an 89% beverage container redemption rate but a very low overall recycling rate of just 19%.

Bottle Bills Divert Valuable Materials From MRFs

Bottle bills create a separate, parallel recycling system for less than 5% of the waste stream. In doing so, they divert valuable materials away from recycling facilities, or materials recovery facilities (MRFs). This reduces the overall value of materials collected through curbside recycling programs that feed MRFs. While only about 5% by weight, aluminum and polyethylene terephthalate (PET) beverage containers are 30% of the blended value. Requiring consumers to transport and deposit their recyclables at collection facilities would remove up to 89% of plastics and aluminum from curbside recycling.

Most MRFs share commodity revenues with municipalities and haulers to help offset the cost of curbside recycling programs. The loss of this revenue will increase curbside recycling costs for customers and municipalities, which could lead municipalities to discontinue their curbside recycling programs that rely on the revenues of these commodities. It also may threaten public and private recycling facilities, forcing them to cut jobs or shut down due to loss of revenue.

Bottle bills typically have a high redemption rate with higher return rates in states with a 10-cent deposit as opposed to those with a 5-cent deposit.



The costs to operate the redemption centers are supported and paid for by unredeemed deposits, which means that they are paid for by the consumer. Consumers who elect to utilize the more convenient curbside recycling option are penalized twice: first by not receiving back their deposit and second by potentially facing higher costs curbside.

High Recycling Rates are accomplished through Curbside Recycling

The Environmental Protection Agency's goal for a 50% U.S. recycling rate can only be accomplished through healthy curbside recycling programs. The revenue reductions that will result from bottle bills to curbside recycling will make curbside programs significantly more expensive than the current marketplace and set us further back from attaining this goal.