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# Why States Need to Adopt Bottle Bill Redemption Laws

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## What is “the bottle bill redemption Law”?



Bottle bill redemption programs, also known as “container redemption programs” and “container deposit legislation” (CDL), work by charging a deposit on certain types of beverage containers at the time of purchase. The deposit fee on these containers is then

refundable to the consumer when the empty bottle is returned. The amount of the deposit fee varies from state to state.

## What is the history of bottle bill redemption law legislation?



Before the 1950s, beverages were sold in glass bottles that were then returned, washed, and refilled. However, the decades that followed brought steel and aluminum cans, which quickly became the dominating packaging style in the beer market. Additionally, America’s demand for convenience gave way to the development of single-use, disposable plastic soda bottles. By

1970, disposable bottles and cans made up over 50% of the market for beverage containers, and beverage container litter had dramatically increased.

In 1970, British Columbia was the first place in North America to enact a bottle bill redemption law. Shortly thereafter, states in the U.S. followed. There are now 10 states with bottle redemption laws. Oregon enacted theirs in 1971; Vermont in 1973; Connecticut in 1978; Iowa in 1978; Maine in 1978; Michigan in 1978; Massachusetts in 1982; New York in 1982; California in 1986; and Hawaii in 2002.

## What is the history of the expansions of existing bottle bill redemption laws?

The early bottle bill redemption laws primarily redeemed water, soda, and beer bottles. Most charged a deposit fee of 5 cents. As the markets for iced teas, sport drinks, and juices grew, it became clear that the existing



bottle bills needed to be modernized. By 2020, many states realized they had to expand their bottle bills to include these newer drinks. They also realized that, with inflation, the 5-cent deposit was no longer a good enough incentive to get the bottles back, and that they needed to raise their

fees to 10 cents. The states that currently have a 10-cent deposit fee are Michigan, Oregon, and California. Connecticut will as of January 1, 2024.

## Why are bottle bill redemption laws important?



States with bottle bills have a higher rate of return for empty beverage containers that are redeemable. Because the material is collected separately from other materials, it tends to be less contaminated and of higher quality than what is collected in recycle bins.

Most beverage bottles today are plastic. Americans use about 425 beverage containers per person per year. For plastic water bottles, only 30% get recycled and 70% end up in landfills, oceans, as litter, or get incinerated. Other empty beverage containers often end up in the garbage, as litter on streets and in parks, landfilled, or incinerated.

In general, states with bottle bill redemption laws experience a 75% to 80% return rate on redeemable containers – meaning that the vast majority of beverage containers being sold are making their way back after use. It also means that all those bottles are being removed from the states' waste stream. Studies show that beverage container legislation has reduced total roadside litter by between 30% and 64% in states with bottle bills.

## Which bottle bill redemption laws have worked best?

Michigan and Oregon have the highest beverage bottle return rates in the country. Both states have a 10-cent deposit fee. Michigan has a return rate of 89%; Oregon has 86%; Maine 84%; and Vermont 77%. The lowest rates are Connecticut, with 44%, and Massachusetts with 43%.

Connecticut will raise its deposit fee from 5 cents to 10 cents on January 1, 2024, hoping to get a better rate of return.

## What happens in the states that have bottle bill redemption laws?

By enacting bottle bill redemption laws, states put a cash value on each beverage container, which makes it more likely that these containers will be returned. Bottle bill programs create monetary incentives that reduce the amount of waste that is produced by beverage containers. Research



indicates that when you have a bottle bill there is an average reduction in bottle litter of 73%, based on seven states where there have been before/after studies. The states studied were Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, and Vermont.

Many of the beverage containers are made of plastic, and it is critical that they be removed from the waste stream. Most juice, iced tea, sports drinks and water bottles are made of plastic – getting those



containers returned is extremely important. Just looking at plastic water bottles, Americans purchase about 50 billion water bottles per year. That alone is reason to have a bottle redemption law to get them out of the waste stream.

## What happens in the states that do not have bottle bill redemption laws?

Many states that do not have bottle bills claim they are promoting recycling instead of enacting bottle bill redemption laws – but recycling rates remain very low. An example of this is Tennessee, which proposed



a bottle bill in 2009 and 2010 that failed to pass even though 10 county commissions voted to endorse the bill. Meanwhile, the recycling rate in Tennessee is 10%, which was projected to increase to 80% with a bottle bill. Discarded bottles and cans are

the primary contributor to litter in Tennessee. According to the Last Beach Cleanup and Beyond Plastics, the recycling rate for post-consumer plastic was just 5% to 6% in 2021.



The U.S. has a national recycling average of all materials of 32%. The U.S. ranks very low when compared to the rest of the world in recycling percentage. Of the major countries that track recycling data, the United States is ranked 25 out of 32.

## What keeps states from adopting bottle bill redemption law legislation and what are the natural enemies?



(1) One of the first hurdles for states that have never had bottle bill redemption laws is creating a place where consumers can return their empty bottles. States that enacted bottle bills early have already built redemption areas attached to grocery stores. This

makes returning empty bottles very easy for consumers, as they can bring back their empty bottles to where they had bought them. Not having redemption areas attached to grocery stores immediately positions grocery stores as enemy number one because they do not want to spend the money to build redemption areas.



(2) Beverage companies do not want the extra deposit fee attached to their beverages. The American Beverage Association (ABA) actively campaigns against new or modernizing bottle bill redemption laws. Companies like

Coca-Cola, PepsiCo., Anheuser-Busch, and water bottle associations have all spent millions to block bottle bill redemption laws from being enacted.



(3) Haulers are paid by the weight of the trash they haul, so they want as much trash as possible. Haulers will lobby against bottle bill redemption laws that would result in the weight reduction of the collected trash and lower their income.

(4) The food industry of America will also come out against bottle bill redemption laws, as they represent grocery stores.

Enacting bottle bills will allow states to get far greater amounts of plastic, glass and tin out of their waste streams than by states enacting recycling programs.

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