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Connecticut's Bottle Deposit Law Frequently Asked Questions

Connecticut's bottle deposit law (AKA "*The Bottle Bill*") took effect in 1980, and has proven to be Connecticut's most effective tool for eliminating litter and increasing recycling in our communities. The law requires consumers to pay a 5-cent refundable deposit when purchasing carbonated beverages and bottled water, which they can redeem when they return their containers to a retailer or redemption center. This 100% refundable deposit is a proven financial incentive to encourage recycling of carbonated beverage containers and water bottles, preventing them from ending up in the trash or littering our environment.

Unfortunately, Connecticut's bottle bill has come under attack in recent years. Distributors are seeking to avoid their responsibilities under the law. As a result, many misconceptions about the bottle deposit have begun to circulate, creating confusion about this critically important program. Here are the facts regarding frequently asked questions about Connecticut's bottle deposit law and its benefits to our state.

FAQ's

Q: How does Connecticut's bottle deposit work?

A: Each retailer in Connecticut pays a beverage distributor a 5-cent deposit on each carbonated beverage container and water bottle they purchase. Consumers then pay a 5-cent deposit for each beverage container they purchase from the retailer. The consumer can return empty containers to the retailer or a redemption center to redeem their deposit. The distributor then reimburses the retailer or redemption center 5 cents for each beverage container.

Q: Does the retailer receive any compensation for collecting bottles and cans under the bottle bill?

A: In addition to the deposit, retailers receive a handling fee of 1.5 cents for each beer container and 2 cents for each carbonated soft drink and noncarbonated beverage container returned. In total, redemption centers and retailers receive a combined \$12 million+ in handling fees each year.¹

Q: What happens to unclaimed nickels not redeemed through the bottle deposit system?

A: Unclaimed deposits are allocated to the State. According to the Container Recycling Institute (CRI), unclaimed nickels from the bottle bill have contributed on average approximately \$28.5 million annually to the General Fund. Bottle deposit revenues are used for a variety of important programs, including the Citizens Election Fund.²

¹ Total containers sold (1.285 billion) and redeemed (656 million) in CY 2015: from Chris Nelson, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Feb. 2017; proportion of count that is beer (23%) vs. other deposit beverages: from "Connecticut Beverage Market Data Analysis," Container Recycling Institute, Feb. 2017.

² Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Q: Is the bottle deposit an effective incentive for recycling?

A: Yes! The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that bottle bill programs are the most effective policy options for reducing litter from assorted beverage containers. According to CRI, deposit systems can reduce beverage container litter by 69-84%, and can result in an overall decrease in litter by 30-65%.³

Q: Why do we still need a bottle deposit when most towns in Connecticut now have single-stream recycling?

A: Because materials collected under the bottle deposit system produce a higher quality post-consumer recycled product than glass and plastic collected through curbside recycling programs. According to a 2017 report published in *Resource Recycling* magazine, glass collected through curbside recycling programs is frequently heavily contaminated with paper, cardboard and other recyclables, which must be sorted mechanically.⁴

Because of this, materials collected through single-stream actually bring in significantly lower per-ton scrap revenues. Curbside PET plastic currently sells for around \$180/ton, compared to PET collected under the bottle deposit, which fetches about \$300/ton.⁵ Curbside glass, in fact, actually costs about \$20/ton to recycle, versus deposit glass that has a \$20/ton scrap value.⁶

Q: How much revenue does the program generate for the state through unclaimed deposits each year?

A: In its latest report, the Department of Revenue Services reported that the State received over \$33 million from unclaimed deposits during the 2015-16 fiscal year. With a 10-cent deposit value and a 75% redemption rate, it is estimated that unredeemed deposits from additional non-carbonated beverages (excluding wine or spirits) could generate an additional \$5.4 million in unredeemed deposits for the State.⁷

Q: How does the bottle deposit program benefit municipalities and/or reduce the burden on CT taxpayers?

A: In addition to promoting recycling, the bottle bill creates an efficient market for recycled aluminum, glass and PET plastic, in addition to providing millions in cost savings for municipalities that would otherwise bear the burden (and costs) of collecting and recycling containers that have been improperly discarded.⁸

Q: How would Connecticut benefit if the bottle deposit were applied to juices, teas and other non-carbonated soft drinks not currently covered by the law?

A: Expanding the program to include additional non-carbonated beverages beyond bottled water, including sports drinks, teas and juice, would add an additional 193 million containers to the program each year.⁹ The environmental benefits of additional beverage container recycling in Connecticut include significant energy savings and greenhouse gas reductions. *CRI estimates that greenhouse gas emissions reductions alone would be equivalent to taking more than 1,000 cars off the road.*¹⁰

Q: What effect would eliminating the bottle deposit have on job creation in Connecticut?

A: Connecticut currently has full service redemption centers in 21 towns including Hartford, East Haven, New Britain, Wallingford, Stratford, Bristol, Windsor, Bloomfield and several others. Additionally, Connecticut is home to ENVIPCO (Naugatuck) and TOMRA (Shelton), which both manufacture machines for collecting bottles and cans at redemption centers throughout Connecticut. According to CRI, eliminating the bottle deposit could result in the loss of 500-600 jobs in the state, including the closure of redemption centers and other related businesses.¹¹

³ "Bottle Bills Prevent Litter." Container Recycling Institute website: <http://www.bottlebill.org/about/benefits/litter.htm>

⁴ "Cullet Comparisons." By Susan Collins, *Resource Recycling* magazine, February 2017. <https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2017/03/02/cullet-comparisons/>

⁵ "2015 Report on Postconsumer PET Container Recycling Activity." National Association for PET Container Resources (NAPCOR), 10/13/16.

http://www.napcor.com/pdf/NAPCOR_2015RateReportFINAL.pdf.

⁶ "Cullet Comparisons."

⁷ "Potential Redemption Rates, Handling Fee Costs, and Unclaimed Deposit Revenue Under Different Scenarios in Connecticut." Container Recycling Institute, February 2017.

⁸ "CRI Opposes Connecticut Senate Bill 996, CRI Supports House Bill 5618." Letter of testimony from the Container Recycling Institute to the Joint Committee on the Environment, March 2017.

⁹ "Connecticut Beverage Market Data Analysis," Container Recycling Institute, Feb. 2017.

¹⁰ Derived from the "Connecticut Beverage Market Data Analysis," Container Recycling Institute, Feb. 2017, and adjusted to reflect lower reported sales by the CT DEEP.

¹¹ "Winners and Losers: A Financial Analysis of Connecticut Senate Bill 996." Addendum to Letter of testimony from the Container Recycling Institute to the Connecticut Joint Committee on the Environment, March 2017.