

Modernize Connecticut's Bottle Bill

Container Deposits Make Sense (and they make cents!)

Connecticut's Bottle Bill is a critical piece of our state's recycling infrastructure. Since its implementation in 1980, the bottle bill has successfully captured billions of single-serve beverage containers, saving taxpayers millions of dollars in recycling costs over time.

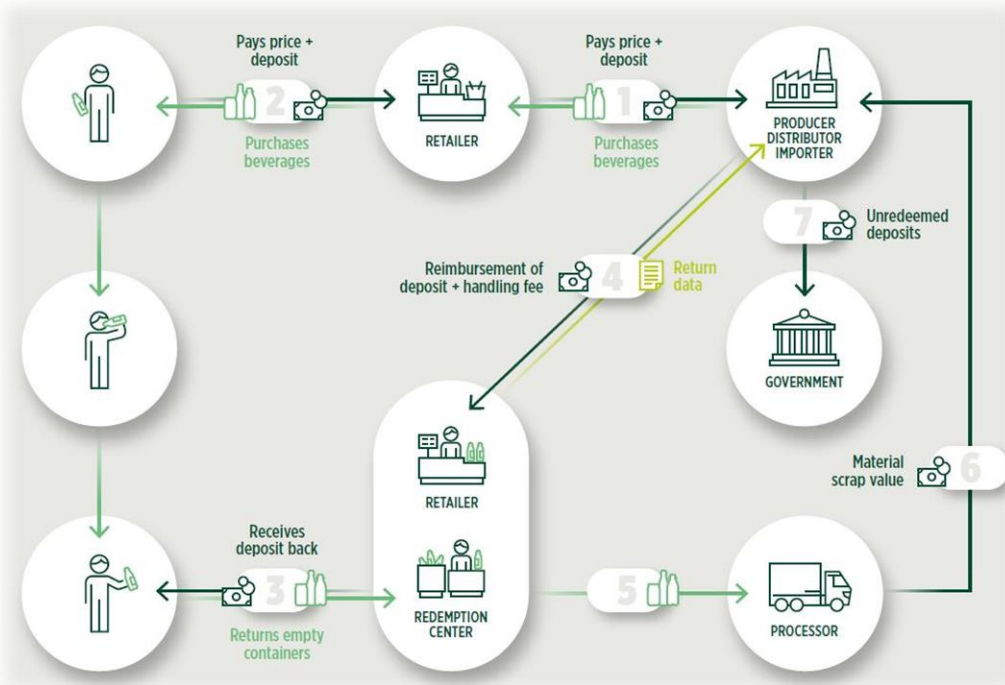
The bottle bill is not a substitute or replacement for existing curbside recycling programs. Deposit programs provide a strong complement to municipal recycling, as they are highly effective at capturing single-serve beverage containers which are typically consumed on the go. In Connecticut, just 28% of non-deposit cans and bottles are recycled through single-stream recycling programs¹.



How Does the Bottle Bill Work?

The bottle bill promotes recycling of single-serve beverage containers by putting a cash value on glass, plastic, and aluminum beverage containers, which can be redeemed by the consumer upon returning containers to be recycled.

In Connecticut, consumers pay the purchase price on covered beverages, plus a 5-cent refundable deposit for each beverage purchased. That deposit is refunded to the consumer when they return containers to a retailer (or independent redemption center) to be recycled. Distributors then reimburse the retailer (or redemption center) 5 cents for each container collected, plus a 1.5 cent handling fee for every beer bottle, 2 cents for each soda or water container recycled. Unredeemed deposits are currently remitted by the beverage distributor to the State of Connecticut.



¹ "Modernizing Connecticut's Bottle Bill," Eunomia (2018)

The Problem

Connecticut's container deposit law (Sections 22a-243 - 22a-246) was enacted in 1978 as a litter prevention method aimed at capturing and recycling discarded bottles and cans. The law initially applied only to carbonated beverages (beer & soda) and was updated in 2008 to include bottled water. Unfortunately, the program has not seen consistent system updates over time to keep up with changing market trends and inflation. As a result, Connecticut's redemption rate has 49% (approximately a 44% decrease from where the program was in 2001).

Connecticut's failure to update the bottle bill has negatively impacted recycling in our state, contributing to increased waste, unsightly litter, and rising waste management and recycling costs for municipalities.

Immediate challenges to be addressed include:

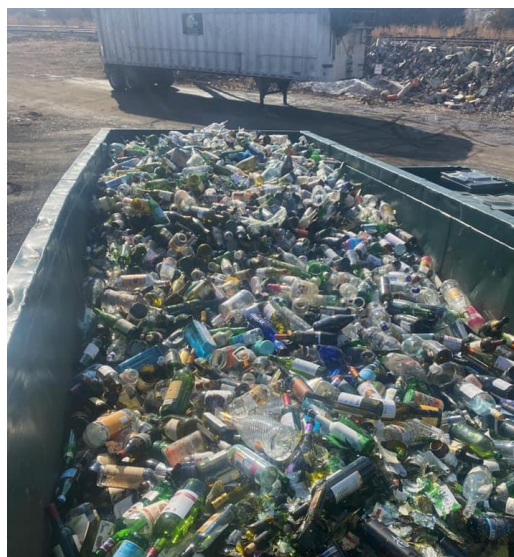
- The 5-cent deposit is of little value in today's economy and fails to create an effective incentive to recycle,
- Incomplete coverage of beverage categories leaves hundreds of millions of containers in the MSW stream each year (costs associated with recycling most beverage containers currently fall on cash-strapped municipalities),
- Lack of convenient redemption options across the state, leaving consumers with limited options for beverage container recycling,
- Handling fees insufficient to support the costs associated with redemption services.

Impacts to Municipalities

Connecticut has limited in-state and local options available for processing glass, plastic, aluminum, and other recyclables. This has contributed to extreme price volatility within the recyclable commodities markets- resulting in skyrocketing MSW & recycling costs for cities, towns, and private haulers. Municipalities that once were able to generate revenue by selling recyclable materials overseas, are now seeing a cost increase for recycling –*some have seen recycling costs increase more than 800% per year!*

The Problem with Glass

Glass recycling has become another major challenge for municipalities across Connecticut. Single-stream recycling programs typically produce mixed color, broken, and contaminated glass, which has little to no value on the commodities market. Glass from single-stream programs can cost as much as \$95/ton to dispose of as landfill cover; while clean, separated deposit glass, has an average scrap value of around \$20/ton.



According to DEEP, approximately 60% of the glass in the blue bin comes from glass wine & liquor bottles.

Glass is especially problematic for Municipal Recovery Facilities (MRFs), as it can create costly infrastructure problems. Broken glass shards and dust act as an abrasive on recycling equipment, contributing to wear and tear and resulting in increased maintenance and repair costs. These costs are passed on to municipalities in the form of higher tip fees. Broken glass

particles frequently attach themselves to paper, cardboard, and other valuable single stream materials, which negatively affects commodity values and ultimately contributes to an increase in municipal solid waste (MSW).

The Container Recycling Institute (CRI) estimates that recycling rates for non-deposit glass containers are as low as 12% in Connecticut, with as much as 16,000 tons of non-deposit glass being discarded in our state each year²! A survey of forty-five MRFs throughout the northeast found that facilities accepting curbside material send almost 40% of the glass collected straight to the landfill to be buried or used as landfill cover³.

Impacts on our Environment

Most single-serve beverage containers are consumed 'on the go', meaning they are frequently consumed in locations where recycling bins and other collection options may not be available. When bottles and cans are not recycled, they often create unsightly litter in our communities and opens spaces. This pollution eventually ends up in our waterways, disrupting marine ecosystems and threatening our wildlife.

The Ocean Conservancy has classified plastic bottles as one of the top ten most found items littering trash cleanups in Connecticut. In 2019, the Ocean Conservancy collected more than 10 thousand beverage containers across the state in a single day⁴. Year after year, most containers recovered from litter cleanups are products that are not currently covered by the bottle bill.

Effective recycling also plays an important role in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gasses contribute to climate change and are closely associated with chronic health issues, such as asthma and other respiratory ailments. Proper recycling lessens the need for virgin materials, reduces truck traffic and promotes energy conservation, all of which play an important role in the efforts to combat climate change⁵.

Environmental Justice Concerns

Pollution and waste from discarded bottles and cans disproportionately impact our low-income and underserved communities. Litter is a major challenge in our inner cities, as they too have struggled with limited resources for waste management in recent years. The City of Waterbury, for example, generated roughly \$10,200 from the sale of recyclable materials in 2015. Today, Waterbury spends roughly \$400,000 per year in tipping fees⁶.

Urban environments frequently lack access to convenient redemption infrastructure, due in large part to the abnormally low handling fee. Over the years, several independent redemption centers have closed their doors due to the fact that they are unable to keep up with rising overhead costs and inflation. This leaves Connecticut overly reliant on return-to-retail options for container redemption, which may leave urban residents with limited opportunities for container recycling.

² "Testimony for House Bill 7294," by Susan Collins of the Container Recycling Institute (March 2019) <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2019/ENVDATA/TMY/2019HB-07294-R000311-Collins,%20Susan,%20President,-Container%20Recycling%20Institute-TMY.PDF>

³ "Northeast MRF Glass Survey Report," NERC (October 2018)

⁴ <https://www.ctriver.org/prevent-pollution-in-the-connecticut-river-expand-the-bottle-bill/>

⁵ <https://archive.epa.gov/region4/rcra/mgtoolkit/web/html/community.html>

⁶ Waterbury Public Works, 2019

A survey by the Recycling Partnership found that 52% of Americans (particularly young and low-income people), feel they lack access to recycling programs⁷. The lack of convenient recycling infrastructure in these communities puts these individuals at a disadvantage. Low-income individuals are more likely to depend on the deposits obtained by redeeming their containers, but there needs to be a measurable incentive as well as a realistic opportunity to participate in the programs. For any recycling initiative to be compelling and inclusive, there must be an equal opportunity for members of all communities to participate.

A Majority of Connecticut Voters Support Modernizing the Bottle Bill!

A January 2020 poll of likely voters in Connecticut found that 81% support expanding the state's bottle deposit program to include all recyclable containers, including 64% who strongly support expansion. That figure includes 75% of Democrats, 62% of independents and 51% of Republicans surveyed, in addition to 55% of all men, and 72% of women surveyed.⁸

The Solution - Modernize Connecticut's Bottle Bill

There are a range of improvements lawmakers can adopt in the near-term to ensure optimal performance for the bottle bill. A series of common-sense updates to the existing program framework will go a long way towards achieving important sustainability outcomes. **At a minimum, Connecticut MUST implement the following essential measures to create an effective, modernized deposit program, including:**

- Establishing a mechanism to raise the handling fee over time, to keep up with the rising cost of doing business,
- Increasing the deposit value to create a stronger incentive to recycle,
- Establishing a timeline to expand the program to include a wider range of beverage types, including non-carbonated soft drinks, wines, and spirits,
- Increasing public access to redemption centers while maintaining robust return-to-retail infrastructure,
- Working to establishing a more equitable collection system, including ensuring timely payments to redemption centers,
- Establishing mechanisms for continued improvement over time, including recycling targets and other measures that ensure new beverages are brought into the program before coming onto the market.

By implementing much needed updates to the bottle bill, Connecticut can significantly increase recycling and create a more equitable and efficient system for recycling single-serve beverage containers across the state. Connecticut lawmakers should take decisive action in 2021 to pass an expanded, modernized bottle bill to save municipalities money and advance the state's solid waste and recycling goals.

⁷ <https://www.americancommunities.org/how-recycling-varies-by-where-you-live/>

⁸ "CT Voters Support Expanding Renewable Energy," Greenberg Quinlan. (January 2020)