

Maryland Needs a Bottle Bill!

HB 735 / SB 642

The Problem

About 5.2 billion beverage containers are sold in Maryland annually.¹ Despite widespread availability of curbside collection of recyclables and public recycling receptacles, only about a quarter of the containers (23%) are captured for recycling. Four billion containers a year, 2.6 billion of which are plastic, are left in the environment—in landfills, on road-sides, in waterways—or incinerated. The number littered is significant: Beverage containers are about half of the trash by volume in the Anacostia watershed's trash traps.²

Plastic beverage containers pollute our waterways and pose a threat to wildlife and human health. They break up into small pieces and are ingested by marine life, injuring and killing fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. Scientists estimate that humans are ingesting up to a credit card's worth of plastic *weekly*.

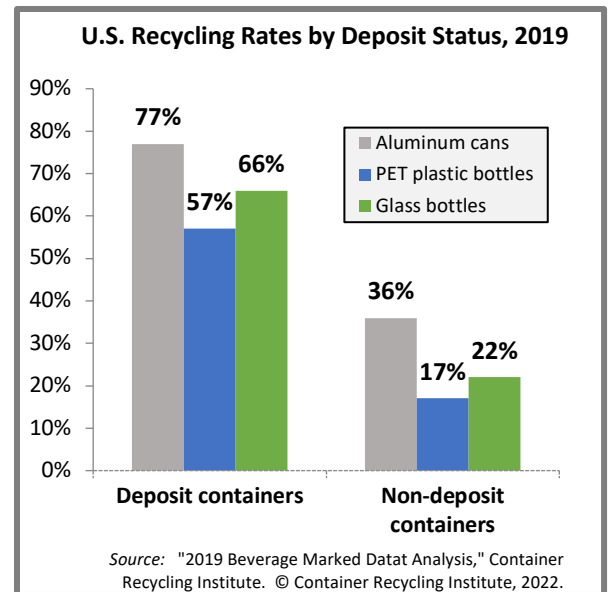


Courtesy of Anacostia Watershed Society

The Solution

Beverage container deposit programs, also known as “bottle bills,” are a proven, highly effective policy for recovering used beverage containers and reducing litter. Ten states, covering about 90 million people, have longstanding, successful programs.³ They add a small deposit to the purchase price of beverage containers that is refunded to customers when the containers are returned for recycling. When empty beverage containers can be redeemed for cash, fewer are littered or likely to remain littered. Purchase the beverage, borrow the container! The refundable deposit is an incentive to return.

Deposit programs also dramatically increase beverage container recycling. The recycling rate for deposit beverage containers is 2-3 times higher than for containers not subject to a deposit, and the impact is greater with higher deposits. States with a 10-cent deposit have achieved container recycling rates of 90%.



How Will the Program Operate?

The Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction bill (HB 735 / SB 642) would create a beverage container deposit program in Maryland with a 10- or 15-cent refundable deposit on metal, glass, and plastic beverage containers, depending on container size. The deposit is refunded to the customer when the beverage container is returned for recycling. The program would rely on reverse vending machines and other new technologies for convenient container redemption to achieve at least a 90% redemption rate.

¹ Container Recycling Institute, Beverage Market Data Analysis, based on 2019 data.

² Anacostia Watershed Society.

³ California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and Vermont. Redemption rates in 2019 ranged from 59% to 91%. There are currently 72 container deposit programs worldwide in 61 countries. Increased interest in the past decade has been fueled by public concern about plastic pollution. Collins, Susan. 2020. "International Embrace," *Plastics Recycling Update*, Winter, pp. 38-43.

The program would be operated by a nonprofit Beverage Container Stewardship Organization selected by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), representing all producers that sell beverages in the state. MDE would provide substantial oversight, approving stewardship plans and annual reports, and setting the programs' convenience standards and handling fees for redemption points. An Advisory Council of stakeholders would advise MDE on plan approval, implementation, and performance.



A reverse vending machine

The program would be self-financing from fees paid by producers, revenue from the sale of raw materials, unclaimed deposits, and penalties. Ten percent of unclaimed deposits would fund a Grant Program to increase the reuse and recycling of beverage containers.

What Are the Program's Benefits?

- **Reduction in beverage container litter and plastic pollution, and an increase in water quality.** It would capture more than 3 billion additional beverage containers annually, including 2 billion plastic bottles
- **Quadrupling of Maryland's beverage container recycling rate.** The recycling rate, currently only 23% of containers sold in the state, would increase to more than 90% with the Bottle Bill.
- **Increase in high quality, food-grade recycled content for new food and beverage containers.** When the targets are achieved, the program will generate an additional 11,305 tons of aluminum, 44,066 tons of PET plastic, 3,207 tons of HDPE plastic, and 140,923 tons of glass to be recycled into new containers.
- **Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.** By reducing the production of new cans and bottles from virgin materials, the additional recycling from this program would eliminate 195,000 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent annually, the equivalent of removing the emissions of 42,000 cars.
- **Savings for taxpayers and local governments.** Beverage producers would finance the costs of collection and processing of the ¾ of beverage containers currently being disposed or littered, as well as the collection and processing of some containers currently recycled curbside. The program will divert materials from costly landfills and incinerators. These disposal costs are currently borne by taxpayers and local governments.
- **Investments in refillable and reusable beverage container systems.** Deposits are critical for development of refillable and reusable containers. The program will launch that transition.
- **Job creation.** Recycling generated by a deposit program creates five times as many jobs as landfilling or incineration.

Support the Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program (HB 735 / SB 642) to reduce litter, prevent plastic pollution, increase recycling, and conserve resources!

