Modernize Connecticut's Bottle Bill

Connecticut is facing a "Silent Crisis" in waste management and Recycling. The State's container deposit law is a proven solution that the legislature can implement now to put Connecticut on the path to sustainable resource management.

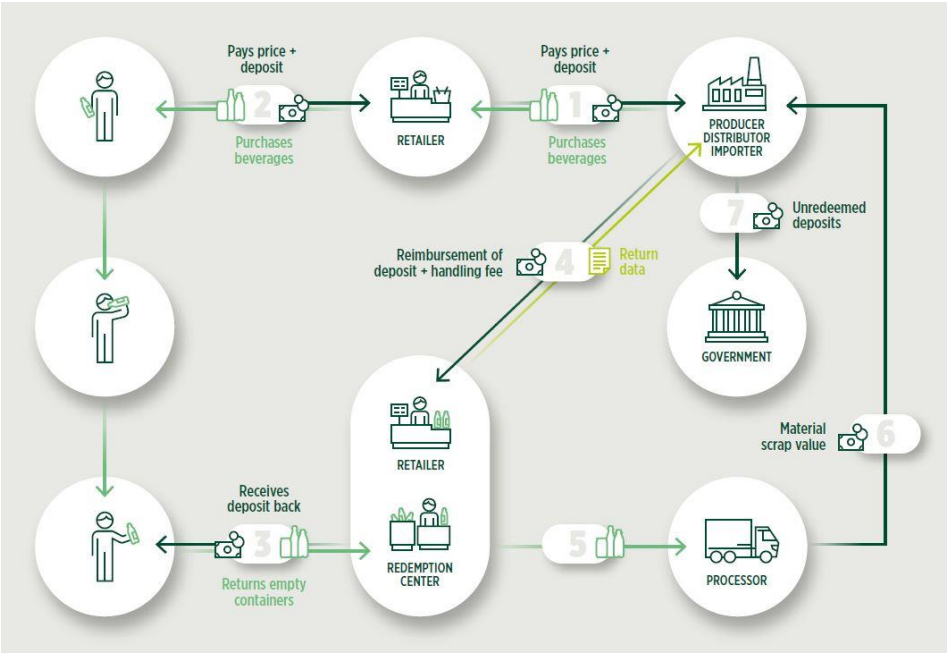
The History of Connecticut's Bottle Bill

Since its implementation in 1980, the bottle bill has captured billions of beverage containers, while saving taxpayers millions of dollars in litter removal and recycling costs.

The bottle bill is not a replacement for curbside recycling programs, but offers a strong complement given that about half are consumed on-the-go, where recycling or waste bins may not be available. *In Connecticut, only 22% of non-deposit cans and bottles are recycled through curbside or drop-off recycling programs*[1]. By comparison, the bottle bill collects more than twice that rate. With targeted adjustments, the program could collect an estimated 636 million additional containers annually[2].

How Does the Bottle Bill Work?

The bottle bill promotes recycling by putting a cash value on highly recyclable glass, plastic, and aluminum beverage containers. This puts the cost of recycling this material on producers, shifting the burden away from taxpayers and municipalities.



Every retailer in Connecticut pays a beverage distributor a 5-cent deposit on each carbonated beverage container and water bottle they purchase. Consumers then pay that 5-cent refundable deposit for each beer, soda, or water beverage they buy. This deposit is refunded to the consumer when they return their containers to the retailer (or redemption center) to be recycled.

[1] " Beverage Market Data Analysis 2018," Container Recycling Institute. 2021.

[2] https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/ENVdata/Tmy/2021SB-01037-R000319-Container%20Recycling%20Institute-TMY.PDF

Distributors reimburse retailers/redemption centers 5 cents for each container collected. In addition, those establishments receive a handling fee of 1.5 cents per beer container and 2 cents per soda or water container. The handling fee is essential for redemption centers and retailers to cover their overhead costs and to keep the system running.

Issues to be Addressed

Connecticut's failure to update the bottle bill has negatively impacted recycling in our State, contributing to increased waste, litter, plastic pollution, and rising waste disposal costs for municipalities.

The 5-cent deposit has little value in 2021 - The 5-cent deposit is of little value in today's economy and fails to create an effective incentive for consumers to return their containers. As a result, Connecticut's redemption rate has dropped to around 49% (about a 44% decrease from where the program was in 2001)[3], which is the lowest collection rate of all ten states with a bottle bill. *If the 5-cent deposit were adjusted over time to keep up with inflation it would be around 20 cents today.*

Popular beverages are not included – Juices, teas, and sports drinks make up some of the fastest growing beverage categories on the market. Unfortunately, these beverages have not been added to the program as new products come to market, leaving hundreds of millions of glass, plastic, and aluminum containers in the waste stream.

Lack of convenient redemption locations - Multiple CT redemption centers have closed their doors in recent years, due to the state's minimal handling fee. With limited options for beverage container recycling, many residents simply toss redeemables into the curbside recycling bin or the trash. This puts the cost of recycling these containers on municipalities and hurts the State's redemption rate.

State	Handling Fees
CT	*Beer* - ***1.5¢*** *Soda, Water* - ***2¢***
ME	**3.5 - 4¢**
MA	**2.25¢ - 3.25¢**
NY	**3.5¢**
VT	**3.5 - 4¢**

Lack of Waste Disposal Capacity Impacting CT Municipalities - With the Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority (MIRA) incinerator in Harford set to shut down in 2022, Connecticut may be forced to truck solid waste to out-of-state landfills within just a few years. This will lead to an increase waste management costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Rising recycling costs - China's National Sword policy to stop buying contaminated recyclables caused their market value to drop in Connecticut. Municipalities that once were able to generate revenue by selling recyclable materials overseas are now seeing huge cost increases for recycling –*some by more than 800% per year*[4]*.*

Impacts on our Environment

Beverage containers are a major source of litter and plastic pollution - This pollution eventually ends up in our waterways, disrupting marine ecosystems, threatening wildlife, and contributing to the plastic ocean pollution crisis. In 2019, the Ocean Conservancy collected more than 10 thousand beverage containers across the state, which making up 4 of the top 5 items found littered in the Connecticut River[5].

[3] "Roadside Litter Control," Maryland State Highway Association. 2001. Study cites Connecticut's 2001 redemption rate.
[4] https://www.ctpost.com/politics/article/CT-s-recycling-market-collapse-13661573.php
[5] https://www.ctriver.org/prevent-pollution-in-the-connecticut-river-expand-the-bottle-bill/

Wasted cans and bottles contribute to climate change – By failing to collect and recycle valuable beverage containers manufacturers are forced to rely on the extraction and production of virgin natural resources, which emits more greenhouse gases than manufacturing containers with recycled content.

Environmental Justice Concerns:

Updating the bottle bill will protect public health - Connecticut incinerates more than 60,000 tons of PET plastic, aluminum, and glass containers every year. Burning plastic bottles releases toxic pollutants such as mercury, lead, dioxins, furans, sulfur dioxides, and volatile organic compounds[6]. These emissions threaten the health of neighboring communities, such as Hartford and Bridgeport. Those same communities have been harder hit by COVID-19, largely because they are home to facilities that emit high concentrations of lung-damaging pollutants.

Reduce litter and save on clean up – Bottles and cans are one of the most common litter items, with nip bottles being a common complaint among the public. Municipalities and businesses pay to clean up this litter. CRI estimates that the bottle bill saves Connecticut taxpayers and private businesses $2.3 million annually in avoided litter abatement costs. If non-carbonated beverages alone are brought into the deposit system, those savings are projected to increase by up to $200,000 per year[7].

Equitable access to container redemption – Urban environments frequently lack access to convenient redemption infrastructure, due in large part to the abnormally low handling fee. As independent redemption centers close their doors, Connecticut has become overly reliant on retailers alone for container redemption, leaving residents in underserved communities with limited opportunities for container recycling.

The Solution: Modernize Connecticut's Bottle Bill

A series of common-sense updates to the existing deposit program framework will help our state achieve critical sustainability goals. **Essential components to an effective, modernized deposit program include *at a minimum:***

- Raise the handling fee over time, to keep up with the rising cost of doing business,
- Increase the deposit value to create a stronger incentive to recycle,
- Expand the program to include a wider range of beverage types, including non-carbonated beverages, wines, and spirits,
- Increase convenient public access to redemption services, including more redemption centers and a robust return-to-retail infrastructure,
- Work to establish a more equitable collection system, that ensures timely payments to redemption centers,
- Establish mechanisms for continual improvement over time, including recycling targets and other measures that ensure new beverages are brought into the program before coming onto the market.

[6] *See* David Azouly, Plastic & Health: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet, 44–47 (2019)
[7] "Testimony for House Bill 7294," Susan Collins of The Container Recycling Institute. March 2019

Benefits of Modernization

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

Save towns money – Municipalities stand to save millions on avoided disposal, collection, processing, and litter removal costs. Massachusetts DEQ found that a modernized bottle bill would save municipalities between $4.2 and $6.9 million statewide[8].

Create jobs and support small businesses – When New York increased its handling fee, the state created over 600 new redemption centers. A 2019 analysis found that if New York were to expand to new beverage categories and raise the deposit like Connecticut it would create over 2,000 jobs[9].

Raise the recycling rate for bottles and cans – A higher deposit value creates a stronger incentive to recycle. When Oregon increased its deposit from five to ten cents the collection rate for deposit containers jumped from 64% in 2016 to 86% in 2019[10].

Reduce litter and plastic pollution - States that have a strong deposit law generate 66% less litter from bottles and cans than states that do not[11].

Improve air quality - An updated Bottle Bill could divert thousands of tons of containers from Connecticut's waste incinerators and help improve air quality by reducing emissions of toxic pollutants such as mercury, lead, dioxins, furans, sulfur dioxides, and volatile organic compounds.

Fight climate change – Proper recycling lessens the need for the extraction and production of virgin materials, reduces truck traffic and promotes energy conservation, all of which play an important role in the effort to combat climate change. Making beverage containers from recycled content uses less energy and fossil fuels than using virgin materials: recycled aluminum uses 95% less energy, recycled plastic uses 30% less energy, and recycled glass uses 35% less energy[12].

Provide convenient and equitable access to container redemption – Raising the handling fee and requiring certain chain retailers to install RVM's will substantially increase the number of redemption points statewide making it easy for the public to participate in recycling and regain their deposit money.

Fairly distribute redemption volume between retailers and redemption centers – When New York increased its handling fee in 2009, a third of the redemption volume shifted to redemption centers helping retailers share redemption requirements. A ten-cent deposit value would also generate increased foot traffic from more high value consumers.

[8] https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3352/635-REQUEST-FOR-SUPPORT-OF-BOTTLE-BILL
[9] https://www.eunomia.co.uk/reports-tools/employment-economic-container-deposits-ny/
[10] "Oregon," BottleBill.org 2019.
[11] "Understanding the effects of marine debris on wildlife," CSIRO. 2014
[12] https://www.asyousow.org/our-work/waste/beverage-container-recycling