

# The Bottle Bill: Our Most Effective Recycling Program



THE BOTTLE BILL IS THE STATE'S MOST SUCCESSFUL recycling and litter prevention program. Since the Bottle Bill's inception in 1983, *over 30 billion containers*<sup>1</sup> have been redeemed, contributing to a healthier environment, cleaner and safer communities, and a stronger economy. But to keep up with the times and consumer's tastes, the bottle bill must be updated.

An Updated Bottle Bill would expand our container deposit system to include "new age" drinks such as non-carbonated beverages, water, iced tea, juice, and sports drinks. It would add \$15 million to state revenue via projected unclaimed deposits. It would decrease litter - and increase recycling.

An estimated 20 billion "new-age" beverages are consumed annually in the US, and this number is only expected to increase. As consumers purchase more of these beverages, an increasing number of containers are finding their way to landfills -- an estimated 69,000 tons nationwide.

The original bottle bill was never meant to be non-reactive to consumer trends. According to former Litter: Requiring a 5-cent deposit on *all* drink containers would decrease litter and increase recycling. States that have implemented bottle bills have experienced a 70-85% reduction in beverage container litter<sup>2</sup> and a 30 - 35% reduction in overall litter<sup>3</sup> after the bottle bill was implemented. In our waterways, non-redeemable containers are 9 times more likely to wind up as litter than deposit containers.<sup>4</sup> Unlike many other materials, PET bottles NEVER break down, and they pose threats to marine life for hundreds, and perhaps thousands of years.<sup>5</sup>

Decrease Landfill Use: The more trash we burn and bury in the Commonwealth, the worse our environmental problems become. Fourteen towns have lost drinking water from contamination suspected to come from leaking landfills. Drink containers take up space far beyond their weight.<sup>6</sup>

Recycling and Energy: Updating the Bottle Bill would be good for recycling industries. Most of the containers under the

proposed update are made of PET plastic, which is 99% petroleum. But even though there is a shortage of recycled PET, only 20% of all PET bottles are recycled<sup>7</sup> – and this number is decreasing every year. At the same time, the nation's consumption and disposal of PET bottles is skyrocketing. In 2003, an estimated 2.8 *billion* pounds of PET beverage bottles were wasted, up from 0.8 billion pounds wasted one decade earlier.<sup>8</sup> Had these bottles been recycled, we would have saved the energy equivalent of about 12.8 million barrels of crude oil.<sup>9</sup>



Recycling: The Bottle Bill *complements* curbside recycling. About 68%<sup>1</sup> of covered beverage containers are redeemed under the Massachusetts bottle bill; an additional 10% are estimated to be recovered through curbside programs, totaling almost 80%. In sharp contrast, only 20% of non-covered containers are recycled.

Jobs and the Economy: Gains in employment have been shown in nearly every state with deposit systems. In Michigan an additional 4,684 jobs were added to the economy. New York found that 3,800 new jobs were created in that state. Massachusetts and Vermont gained 1,800 and 350 jobs respectively.<sup>10</sup> Many of these jobs come in the recycling sector, which now produces important – and sustainable – raw materials to be used in manufacturing.

Revenue: Unclaimed deposits currently provide \$37 million annually<sup>11</sup> in badly needed funding. Under the expansion, more than \$15 million would be added.<sup>12</sup>

Revenue generated by the bottle bill is a voluntary fee, not a tax, since deposits are fully refundable to consumers.

The bill includes provisions to increase the handling fee to 3.25¢. Redemption centers have not had an increase in handling fees in 17 years. They are currently experiencing huge increases in operating costs; many of them have been forced to close. This increase would allow them to continue operating. Like the current handling fee of 2.25¢, this increase would not be funded by the state.

*“Had anyone the slightest inkling that in a few years containers filled with water, iced tea and juice would compose over 25% of the market, I would have absolutely drafted the law to place deposits on these containers as well.*

*State Senator Lois Pines, the lead sponsor of the original bottle bill,*



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to help update the Bottle Bill, contact*

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<sup>1</sup> MA Bottle Bill Return Rate Information FY1990-2007 (DEP Report From DOR)

<sup>2</sup> “The 10¢ Incentive to Recycle.” Container Recycling Institute, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts DEP estimate, compiled by the Environmental Action Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> Mass. Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement survey, 2003, conducted at Charles River Cleanup.

<sup>5</sup> National Association for PET Container Resources (NAPCOR)

<sup>6</sup> PET takes up 9.8 cubic yards per ton as opposed to 2.75 “average” landfill materials, BEAR Report, EPA Landfill Waste and Geotechnical Stability Report, Feb 2003

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 2002 Report

<sup>8</sup> Estimate provided by the Container Recycling Institute, using data from NAPCOR.

<sup>9</sup> Estimate provided by the Container Recycling Institute, using energy savings factors from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

<sup>10</sup> “The 10¢ Incentive to Recycle.” Container Recycling Institute, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid