

Bottles and Cans Recycling Refund Act

HB 1607 / SB 5502



Are you sick of litter?

Ten states have bottle and can recycling refund programs, known as “bottle bills.” Data from those states show an **80% reduction in beverage container litter compared to states like Washington that have no bottle bill in place.**

Beverage containers and associated items like caps are among the top items we pick up when we do litter cleanups at our beaches and along highways. In 2022, Ecology conducted a study of litter along highways and found an average of 42 pounds of beverage containers per mile!

Want cleaner recycling?

We put all of our recycling together into the blue bin. One problem with this is that the different items in the bin end up contaminating the others. For example, liquids in the bottles and cans get the paper wet, making it difficult to recycle. Also, recyclables get crushed in the recycling trucks in order to make the trucks more efficient, with fewer trips through the neighborhoods. Crushed glass bottles make little glass shards. These shards end up getting all over the other recyclables, creating contamination.

The Solution: a bottle bill

In addition to reducing litter, a bottle bill would increase recycling rates in Washington by incentivizing recycling and pulling beverage containers into a clean recycling stream separated from other materials. Evidence from Oregon and British Columbia show this program could increase recycling for beverage containers to 80–90% for bottles and cans within 3–5 years. **Less litter and cleaner recycling streams will save money for local governments and their ratepayers.**

How a bottle bill would work

Consumers would pay a 10-cent deposit on most beverage containers and be refunded that 10-cents back when they bring their containers to convenient drop-off locations to be recycled or reused. Drop-off locations would be located throughout the state, including places that offer immediate refunds, in addition to stores in local communities that choose to participate in the program. In Oregon, major grocery stores offer a 20% bonus to customers when they use their bottle bill refunds to buy groceries in their stores.

Beverage brands would form a “producer responsibility organization” (PRO) to fund and implement the program. The bill includes required targets that the PRO must hit: 65% redemption rate by Year 3 and 80% by Year 6. After Year 5, reuse rates must increase annually.

Any unredeemed refunds must be used by the PRO to improve the program, including education and outreach and infrastructure.

Importantly, with the state budget crisis in mind, **the PRO will 100% cover the state's costs, including oversight, administration, education and enforcement.**

Contact Information:

Heather Trim, Zero Waste Washington
heather@zerowastewashington.org