

Maryland Needs a Bottle Bill!

(HB 331 / SB 342)

The Problem

About 5.5 billion beverage containers are sold in Maryland annually.¹ Despite widespread availability of curbside collection of recyclables and public recycling receptacles, only a quarter of the containers (25%) are captured for recycling. More than 4 billion containers a year, 2.6 billion of which are plastic, are left in the environment—in landfills, on roadsides, in waterways—or incinerated. The number littered is significant: Beverage containers are more than 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 we are ingesting up to a credit card's worth of plastic weekly.

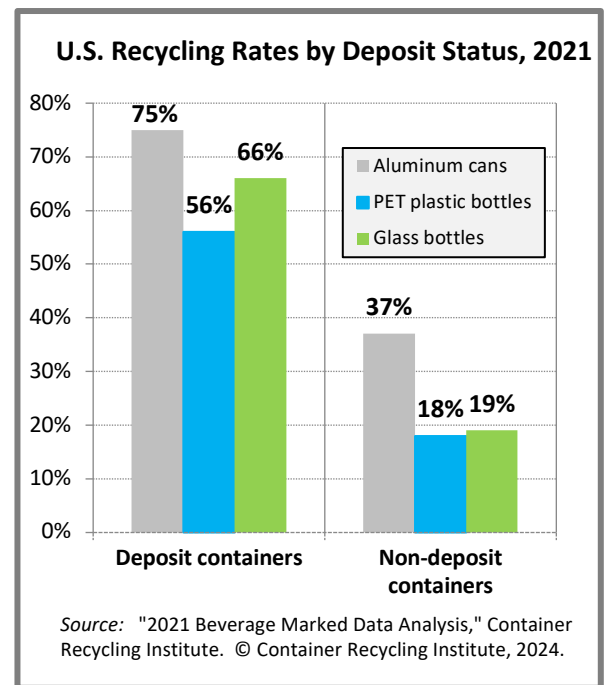


Courtesy of Anacostia Watershed Society

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 more than 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 (figure at right). The recycling rate for deposit beverage containers is 2-3 times higher than for non-deposit containers, and the impact is greater with higher deposits. States with a 10-cent deposit have achieved container recycling rates of 90%.



How Would the Program Operate?

The Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program 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% recovery rate.

¹ Container Recycling Institute, Beverage Market Data Analysis, based on 2021 data.

² Anacostia Watershed Society.

³ California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and Vermont. Recycling rates in 2021 ranged from 50% to 89%. 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 representing all producers that sell beverages in the state. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) would select the Organization and provide substantial oversight, approving stewardship plans and annual reports and setting the program's convenience standards and handling fees. An Advisory Council of stakeholders would advise MDE on plan approval, implementation, and performance. 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 of beverage containers.



A reverse vending machine

The Program's Benefits

- **Reduction in beverage container litter and plastic pollution, and an increase in water quality.** It would capture 3.6 billion additional beverage containers annually, including 2.3 billion plastic bottles.
- **Quadrupling of Maryland's beverage container recycling rate.** The estimated recycling rate, currently only 25% of containers sold in the state, would increase to more than 90%.
- **Increase in high quality, food-grade recycled content for new food and beverage containers.** The program would generate an additional 13,328 tons of aluminum, 47,665 tons of PET plastic, 7,847 tons of HDPE plastic, and 159,397 tons of glass to be recycled into new containers, annually.
- **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 231,707 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent annually, the equivalent of removing the emissions of 50,371 cars.
- **Savings for taxpayers and local governments.** Beverage producers would finance the costs of collection, processing, and recycling of beverage containers currently disposed, littered, and recycled, diverting materials from landfills and incinerators, saving costs for taxpayers and local governments.
- **Investments in refillable and reusable beverage container systems.** Deposits are critical for development of refillable and reusable containers. The program would launch that transition.
- **Job creation.** Recycling generated by a deposit program creates five times more jobs as do landfilling or incineration.

Support the Maryland Bottle Bill in 2026 to reduce litter, prevent plastic pollution, increase recycling, and conserve resources! It passed the House Environment and Transportation Committee in 2025! We have momentum!

