

Rebuttals to Top 10 Arguments Used Against the Bottle Bill

1. ARGUMENT: Deposit systems target a small part of the waste stream (less than 3% of municipal solid waste (MSW) by weight).

REBUTTAL: While soda containers are only 2.7% of the waste stream, all beverage containers (excluding milk containers) are 4.4% of the waste stream.¹ More important, the upstream environmental effects of container wasting are disproportionately high. For example, beverage containers account for 20% of the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from landfilling a ton of MSW and replacing the wasted products with new products made from virgin materials.²

2. ARGUMENT: Deposits aren't needed where there is curbside recycling.

REBUTTAL: Complementary systems get best results in a diverse society (see #3 below).

3. ARGUMENT: Per ton collected, deposits are more expensive than other programs.

REBUTTALS:

- a) Deposits are also much more effective (bang for the buck). The BEAR report found that a combination of recycling methods in 10 deposit states recycles 490 containers per capita per year, at a cost of 1.53¢/unit, vs. 191 containers per capita per year at 1.25¢/unit in 40 non-deposit states (which rely on curbsides and drop-offs to do the whole job). In other words, at an additional cost of only 1.5¢ per six-pack, beverage container recovery rates in deposit states are more than two and a half times higher than in states without bottle bills.³
- b) Under deposit systems, the cost of recycling is borne by producers and consumers, not by government and taxpayers.

4. ARGUMENT: Deposits rob curbside programs of valuable aluminum can revenue.

REBUTTALS:

- a) As it is, curbsides are failing to adequately capture aluminum cans. Despite a tripling in curbside access in last decade (2,711 programs in 1990, 9,709 in 2000), the U.S. aluminum can recycling rate went from 65% in 1992 to 49% in 2001.⁴
- b) Curbsides do not target cans consumed away from home.
- c) Aluminum cans are being gradually supplanted by PET bottles,⁵ so they cannot be counted on as a stable revenue source indefinitely.
- d) Deposits reduce collection costs by removing cumbersome, low-value glass and plastic bottles from the stream. Plastic bottles are cumbersome to collect at curbside (low weight-to-volume ratio)⁶; mixed-color glass is heavy and has a low scrap value, and is often impossible to market.⁷
- e) It is unfair to expect one container type to “carry” the others.
- f) It is unfair to expect curbside recycling to generate revenue when this expectation has never been made of landfilling or incineration.

(Rebuttals to Top 10 Arguments Used Against the Bottle Bill, cont'd)

5. ARGUMENT: Deposit return is inconvenient (consumers prefer home curbside bins).

REBUTTALS:

- a) Curbside is still not available to 50% of the American population.⁸
- b) Curbsides don't address away-from-home consumption.
- c) Tripling of curbside access in last decade has not stemmed the tide of waste.⁹
- d) People are going back to the store to shop anyway; special trips are rare.¹⁰

6. ARGUMENT: Deposit systems address a small portion of litter: 7 to 25 percent.

REBUTTALS:

- a) Beverage containers comprise 40-60% of litter. The Solid Waste Coordinators of Kentucky found that 58% of litter collected consisted of beverage containers, pull tabs, and closures.¹¹
- b) Deposit laws significantly reduce container litter AND other types of litter. Following the implementation of bottle bills in various states, container litter has been reduced by 69 to 84 percent (including in New York)¹², while total litter has been reduced by 34-64 percent.¹³

7. ARGUMENT: Deposit returns are expensive for distributors.

REBUTTALS:

- a) There is a cost to dealing with beverage container waste, whether through recycling or disposal; it will either be borne by government or by brand-owners, distributors, and beverage consumers.
- b) Distributors have taken back-hauling out of the distribution system; they have the ability to design it back in.
- c) Distributors will pass the cost of handling on to consumers.

8. ARGUMENT: "Deposits are a tax" and increase the price of beverages.

REBUTTALS:

- a) Unlike taxes, deposits are 100% refundable.
- b) Handling costs passed on to consumer will be small: a few pennies per six-pack (see #3 above).

9. ARGUMENT: Deposits reduce sales. Consumers will shop in nearby town/other state.

REBUTTAL: States already have differing sales taxes, etc.

10. ARGUMENT: Disliked by retailers (incompatible with food sales; sanitation/storage issues)

REBUTTAL:

- a) No health problems associated with deposit systems have ever been documented.¹⁴
- b) Redemption centers and reverse vending machines mitigate the perception of problems.

Sources used for “Rebuttals to Top 10 Arguments Used Against the Bottle Bill”

¹ Glass beer and soft drinks bottles: 2.5%; Glass wine and liquor bottles: 0.8%; Aluminum beer and soft drink cans: 0.7%; Plastic soft drink bottles: 0.4%. From: Table 19, “Products Generated in the Municipal Waste Stream, 1960 to 2000 (with detail on containers and packaging)” in “Municipal Solid Waste in The United States: 2000 Facts and Figures.” Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (5305W) EPA530-R-02-001, June 2002.

² “Energy to Waste?” Usman Valiente, *Solid Waste and Recycling*, April/May 2000.

³ Table ES-1, “Understanding Beverage Container Recycling: A Value Chain Assessment Prepared for the Multi-Stakeholder Recovery Project.” Global Green USA, January 16, 2002.

⁴ Tripling of curbside access in last decade from “The State of Garbage in America,” *BioCycle*, December 2001. Rising tide of [container] waste in last decade: 1.21 million tons of containers and packaging were landfilled or incinerated in 2000, up from 1.17 million tons in 1990. Source: Table 17 “Products Discarded in the Municipal Waste Stream, 1960 to 2000 (with detail on nondurable goods),” Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (5305W) EPA530-R-02-001, June 2002.

⁵ Table 2.1 “Beverage Package Market: Volume, Share and Growth by Package Type 1997 – 1999 (r).” in “Beverage Packaging in the U.S., 2000 Edition.” Beverage Marketing Corporation, October 2000.

⁶ Aluminum cans collected at curbside yield about \$32/cubic yard in gross revenues, compared to about \$5 and \$15 for PET and glass bottles respectively. Derived from the following data: weight-to-volume ratios for whole uncompact containers (in lbs/cubic yard): glass bottles: 600; PET bottles: 40; aluminum cans: 62.5. Source: “Appendix B: Standard Volume-to-Weight Conversion Factors,” in “Measuring Recycling: A Guide for State and Local Governments.” U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (5306W) EPA530-R-97-011, September 1997. Prices for materials in October 2002: aluminum cans: \$0.51/lb; PET bottles: \$0.07/lb; Glass bottles: \$0.025/lb. Source: Container Recycling Report, Vol. 13, No. 12, Dec. 2002, Portland, OR.

⁷ Jenny Gitlitz. “Glass Recycling Market Trends, Contamination Problems Discussed.” *American Recycler* Vol. 4 No.10, Oct. 2001.

⁸ Derived from data in “The State of Garbage in America,” *BioCycle*, December 2001.

⁹ Tripling of curbside access in last decade from “The State of Garbage in America,” *BioCycle*, December 2001. Rising tide of [container] waste in last decade: 1.21 million tons of containers and packaging were landfilled or incinerated in 2000, up from 1.17 million tons in 1990. Source: Table 17 “Products Discarded in the Municipal Waste Stream, 1960 to 2000 (with detail on nondurable goods),” Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (5305W) EPA530-R-02-001, June 2002.

¹⁰ Report by DSM Environmental Services, Inc. (Contact CRI for *title and date*).

¹¹ “Litter in Kentucky: A View from the Field.” Solid Waste Coordinators of Kentucky, May 1999.

¹² Beverage container litter reduction: 69-77% in Maine (p. 9, “State’s Experience With Beverage Container Deposit Laws Shows Positive Benefits.” U.S. General Accounting Office/Comptroller General of the United States, December 11, 1980); 84% in Michigan (“Michigan Roadside Litter Composition Survey: Final Report.” Michigan Department of Transportation, Maintenance Division. December 1979); 70-80% in New York (“Final Report of the Temporary State Commission on Returnable Beverage Containers,” March 27, 1985).

¹³ Total litter reduction: 30% in Massachusetts (“Bottle Bills in the 1980’s: A Handbook for Effective Citizen Action,” Environmental Action Foundation, August 1987), 34-64% in Maine (U.S. General Accounting Office/Comptroller General of the United States, December 11, 1980), 47% in Oregon (p. 26, “Oregon’s Bottle Bill: The 1982 Report,” Oregon Department of Environmental Quality).

¹⁴ Survey conducted by the Container Recycling Institute in 2001. Health departments in all 10 bottle bill states were contacted and asked to report incidences of health code violations, or documented cases of transmission of infection due to deposit systems. None were reported.