



# BOTTLE BILL AT 25:

## Law Celebrates Remarkable Success

By Jennifer Kruman

In 1982, Governor Hugh Carey signed New York's Returnable Container Act, better known as the Bottle Bill. The law's original purpose was to reduce litter by encouraging returns of empty beverage containers. Over 25 years it has accomplished its original intent and much, much more.



The Bottle Bill includes carbonated soft drinks, beer, malt beverages, carbonated and non-carbonated mineral water, soda water and wine product containers.

Ten other states also have bottle bills. Oregon was first, in 1971, followed by Vermont, Michigan, Maine, Connecticut, Iowa, New York, Delaware, Massachusetts, California, and most recently Hawaii in 2002. In New York, DEC implements and enforces the bottle bill.

### What is the Bottle Bill?

The law requires a 5¢ deposit on carbonated soft drinks, beer, malt beverages, carbonated and non-carbonated mineral water, soda water and certain wine products, including wine coolers in small containers (one gallon or less in volume). The Bottle Bill does not include non-carbonated products such as spring water, tea, juice, milk and milk products, infant formulas or sports drinks. Today, people often ask why bottled water, tea, juice and sports drinks are not covered by the law. The answer is simple: these products didn't exist in single-serve sizes when the law was passed. Since that

time, the market share of these beverage containers has reached 27 percent and continues to grow.

### How Does it Work?

It's simple: consumers pay a 5¢ deposit on each container when they purchase covered beverages and get the deposit back when they return empty containers. Consumers can return their empty containers to any retail location that sells the same brand and exact type of container, or at hundreds of redemption centers around the state. To be redeemed, containers must be clean and appropriately labeled with the New York refund information (NY 5¢).

### Impact of the Bottle Bill

One of New York's most successful recycling and anti-litter initiatives, the Bottle Bill has helped New Yorkers develop and maintain a recycling conscience and has been an important element in meeting the state's waste reduction and recycling goals. It has had a positive and continuing impact on



Prior to the Bottle Bill, scenes like this were common on New York state beaches.



Since the inception of the current Bottle Bill, container litter has been reduced by almost 80 percent, relieving pressure on valuable landfill space.

recycling and solid waste management in New York State.

Since the Bottle Bill's inception, New Yorkers have redeemed and recycled more than 90 billion containers, representing more than six million tons of recycled material. Container litter has been reduced by an estimated 70-80 percent. People from other areas, even some foreign countries, often show interest in getting a bottle bill enacted. Litter prevention and cleanup programs are very expensive for communities and taxpayers. By preventing containers from becoming litter, the Bottle Bill has significantly reduced clean-up costs.

The Bottle Bill also prohibits the use of detachable tabs on metal containers and plastic loop holders that are not either photodegradable or biodegradable, making New York safer for humans, and fish and wildlife.

With billions of containers redeemed each year, the Bottle Bill has also relieved pressure on valuable landfill space. People who choose not to redeem their containers for the 5¢ deposits can recycle them in local recycling programs. However, this shifts the cost of management to the municipality and eventually to the taxpayer, resulting in higher municipal solid waste management fees. Additionally, when the containers are not returned, the manufacturers and distributors keep the nickel deposit. Since the Bottle Bill was first adopted, manufacturers and distributors have retained \$1.6 billion in unclaimed deposits.

In addition to environmental successes, the Bottle Bill has created a substantial number of jobs in New York. An entire industry has been created to manage the returned containers from small local business redemption centers to large, third-party companies

that manage the returned containers for the beverage industry, as well as jobs at retail establishments to handle the returned containers. This industry has further helped to improve and increase the State's recycling infrastructure by providing a larger, more reliable supply of high quality recyclables. Sorted by type (plastic, glass and metal), either through reverse vending machines or by hand at redemption centers, the raw material supply for the recycling industry is cleaner and more desirable than recyclables collected through curbside programs.

Another economic benefit from the Bottle Bill is its potential as a fund raiser. Youth groups, sports clubs, churches, animal shelters and schools can benefit by collecting and returning bottles and cans.

For example, the Mohonasen Marching Band in Rotterdam, New York has been using bottle drives for the past several years to raise money for band trips. They raise about \$6,000 each year by collecting 120,000 containers in two bottle drives.

Most New Yorkers have been very supportive of the Bottle Bill and view it as a grassroots environmental program. Container recycling is something every New Yorker can do every day to help the environment. A survey of New Yorkers conducted in 2004 by Public Policy Associated, Inc. showed that:

- 84% of voters said they support New York's existing Bottle Bill;
- 78% agreed that the Bottle Bill has made our state much cleaner;

### **Bottle Bill Benefits:**

- 1. Saves approximately 2.3 million barrels of oil per year by recycling glass, aluminum and plastic containers instead of producing new ones.**
- 2. Reduced carbon emissions by 4.6 million metric tons of carbon equivalent (MTCE) since 1983. This is equivalent to the amount generated by 440,000 households.**
- 3. Recycled enough plastic bottles to produce more than 3,000,000 t-shirts from recycled plastic fiber, or nearly 100 square miles of carpeting, enough to carpet 45,000 football fields.**





Principal Wilberlee Range addressed students at the Giffen Elementary School in Albany on May 22, 2007 at the start of their participation in the “25 days for 25 years” bottle drive to commemorate the remarkably successful law.

- 70% support expanding the Bottle Bill to include non-carbonated beverages such as bottled water, fruit drinks, iced teas, and sports drinks; and
- 81% of respondents agreed that curbside recycling by itself is not enough to control litter in New York State.

Please continue to support New York’s Bottle Bill and other recycling efforts. If you have any questions on the Bottle Bill or would like information on how your organization can start a fund-raising program, you can contact the DEC’s Bureau of Solid Waste, Reduction & Recycling, at (518) 402-8705.

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Recycling projects like the one above can be great fund raisers.

## BIGGER BETTER BOTTLE BILL

The proposed Bigger Better Bottle Bill would:

- Cover bottled water, iced tea, juice and other non-carbonated beverages, which make up about 25% of beverage sales;
- Make a substantial dent in the litter that mars our landscape. Today, more than 60 percent of the beverage container litter found on New York shorelines is made up of non-carbonated beverage containers not currently covered by the existing Bottle Bill;
- Redirect beverage containers from disposal to recycling; saving taxpayers’ money by keeping these containers out of our municipal waste stream;
- Require the beverage industry to return unclaimed nickel deposits to the state, to be used for important environmental programs, such as land preservation, recycling and water quality;
- Address global climate change, saving an additional 3.3 million barrels of oil and preventing 281,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year by using recyclable materials to manufacture new products.