

The Bigger Better Bottle Bill

Cleaner Communities ~ Healthier Environment Support for Environmental Programs

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the bottle bill, New York's most effective environmental program. Since 1982, more than 90 billion bottles and cans have been returned and recycled in New York because of the 5-cent refundable deposit on beer and soda containers. The bottle bill has worked hand in hand with local recycling programs to make our communities cleaner and healthier places to live.

We all share responsibility for keeping our communities clean and healthy. But state legislators need to do their part. More than two billion bottles and cans end up in the trash or polluting our state's rivers, beaches and neighborhoods each year because of a loophole in our laws that the politicians in Albany have failed to close.

It's time to make New York's most successful litter prevention and recycling program even more effective. Because the bottle bill was enacted in 1982, before bottled water and sports drinks became popular, it did not include non-carbonated beverages. But today, it makes no sense for a bottle of sparkling water to be covered under the bottle bill and a bottle of plain water to end up as pollution.

Governor Eliot Spitzer has proposed updating the bottle bill to include bottled water and other non-carbonated beverages that were left out of the original law. He has also proposed in his budget to require beverage companies to transfer unclaimed bottle deposits to the state's Environmental Protection Fund to support clean air, water, parks and open space.

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Proposed Updates to New York's Bottle Bill
Expand the bottle bill to include bottled water, iced tea, sports drinks, juice, and other non-carbonated beverages (with exemptions for wine, liquor, dairy products, infant formula, and certain other products). Keep deposit at 5 cents.
Require beverage companies to transfer unclaimed deposits (estimated at \$100 - \$180+ million per year) to the state's Environmental Protection Fund.

We call on the New York State Legislature to support cleaner communities, a healthier environment, and increased funding for environmental programs by adopting the Bigger Better Bottle Bill in the 2007-2008 state budget.

Cleaner Communities

The original purpose of the bottle bill was to control the growing problem of litter. As the beverage industry shifted from refillable bottles to throw-away containers, New Yorkers began seeing more and more bottles and cans polluting our streams and rivers and broken glass in our streets and playgrounds.

The bottle bill has been a tremendous success at cleaning up our communities. The deposit provides an economic incentive for people to return their beverage containers rather than discard them. Immediately after the bottle bill passed, total litter rates dropped by 30%, with a 70% reduction in beverage container litter. But the bottle bill has not kept up with the times. Today, non-carbonated beverages make up a quarter of the beverage market, and a disproportionate amount of our litter. Litter surveys conducted by coastal cleanup volunteers found that two-thirds of the bottles and cans polluting New York's rivers and beaches are non-deposit containers, and these containers make up 20% of the total litter volume. **The Bigger Better Bottle Bill will prevent litter and make our communities cleaner.**

Healthier Environment

With an average return rate of 70%, the bottle bill is by far New York's most effective recycling program. Since 1982, more than six million tons of glass, plastic, and metal have been recycled through the bottle bill, conserving natural resources and energy and reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills. The bottle bill saves tax-payers' dollars by making beverage companies responsible for the waste they generate, rather than placing the burden on local governments.

Today, New Yorkers have more recycling choices because most communities now have curbside recycling. But curbside programs are not effective at capturing single-serve beverage containers. That's because thirst-quenchers like bottled water and sports drinks are typically consumed and discarded away from home. Only 20% of non-deposit beverage containers end up in recycling bins. In contrast, 80% of deposit containers are recycled - 70% through the bottle bill, and another 10% through curbside programs.

Updating the bottle bill to include non-carbonated beverages would ensure that more than 2 billion additional bottles and cans get recycled in New York each year. In plastic bottles alone, this would save almost 600,000 barrels of crude oil and 20,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions. **The Bigger Better Bottle Bill will increase recycling and save tax-payers' dollars.**

Support for Environmental Programs

Currently, beverage companies are keeping an estimated \$85-\$140 million a year in unclaimed deposits from bottles and cans that are not returned. New York is out of step with many other states, which require beverage companies to return unclaimed bottle deposits to benefit the public. The Bigger Better Bottle Bill would direct unclaimed deposits to the State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), a dedicated trust fund for New York's environment. The EPF supports local recycling programs, parks, waterfront revitalization, open space, farmland preservation, and other programs to protect our land, air, and water. Currently, New York's environmental funding needs far outpace existing resources. **The Bigger Better Bottle Bill could generate more than \$180 million a year to support the Environmental Protection Fund.**

More than 500 groups, businesses, and local governments have endorsed the Bigger Better Bottle Bill. For more information about the campaign, contact: NYPIRG, 107 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12210 (518) 436-0876 www.nypirg.org or e-mail Lhaight@nypirg.org.