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The Bottle Bill System and Existing Recycling Infrastructure in Vermont

Casella believes the alignment of bottle bill systems and single stream recycling will encourage technology enhancements and promote increased recycling education.

The History of the Bottle Bill

Before the advent of single stream recycling, bottle bill systems were created in an effort to reduce beverage container litter, and to clean up roadsides. Under these systems customers are required to pay a deposit on beverage containers at the time of purchase which is typically five to ten cents. These deposits are later refunded to customers who return those containers to redemption sites. Deposits are not refunded for containers that are not redeemed. The monies for those unclaimed deposits are kept by the state where the container is sold, and used to pay for conservation efforts, or in some cases, for unrelated general fund purposes. In addition to the deposit, a per container handling fee, usually three to five cents, is paid to redemption centers when containers are redeemed. The handling fee is often paid for by the consumer at the time of purchase, but unlike the deposit, is not refunded when the container is redeemed.

Over time there have been efforts to expand the bottle bill system to include more types of beverage containers not currently part of the deposit system (i.e., water bottles, iced tea, wine). Historically Casella has opposed these efforts because the bottle bill system is an antiquated and redundant system that competes with single-stream recycling to recycle the same types of beverage containers. Where single-stream recycling is designed to accept all types of beverage containers, and other types of recyclable materials, the current bottle bill system is not designed to support additional container types. Over the years we have heard testimony from small store owners, including some redemption centers, that they do not have the space nor personnel necessary to manage additional container types. Until these issues with the current bottle bill system are addressed, expansion of the system should not be considered.

What Recycling Looks Like Today

Today, single-stream recycling has emerged as a convenient way to recycle many materials, including beverage containers. Under this system, residents place materials in recycling bin, which is then left curbside for pickup or dropped at local transfer stations, and the materials are transported to and sorted for marketing at Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs). It is important to note materials processed at MRFs, including Casella's MRF in Rutland, Vermont, are sold to the same end markets as bottle bill materials (for example bales of recycled aluminum cans are processed into new aluminum cans). In an effort to enhance operations, at the Rutland, Vermont MRF, robotics and AI technologies have been incorporated into the system allowing for more effective sorting and processing of materials, which reduce contamination, resulting in cleaner material bales for sale and reuse in new products. We anticipate even further processing refinements over time, as the technology is quickly advancing, and that these advancements will also allow us to process new and different materials.



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Unclaimed Deposits & Funding

Under the single-stream system, beverage container deposits are not redeemed, but instead kept and used by the state where the containers were sold. In Vermont, these funds are currently earmarked for a general fund for clean water initiatives, however, we believe unclaimed deposits should be redirected back into the system to address the inefficiencies of the current system and include the addition of educational materials for the public on what can and cannot be recycled through the bottle bill and single stream recycling system.

Effectively Aligning Systems Will Drive Positive Environmental Change

We believe the current bottle bill system needs to be reformed by aligning it with existing single-stream recycling. If the bottle bill system were to expand as a stand-alone system, impacts to MRFs would be substantial, leading to increased competition for the same materials, instead of these systems working together to achieve the universal goal of litter reduction and increased recycling rates. Should future legislation contemplate expanding the bottle bill system, we believe coupling the bottle bill system with single-stream recycling will improve overall recycling and redemption rates for Vermont, improving collection efficiencies, and providing convenience that encourages consumers to recycle better. As Casella continues to do our part to advance recycling through investments in technologies at our facilities over time, we want to be part of the solution, and would welcome the opportunity to help shape any new policy in Vermont, as a key stakeholder in recycling.

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