

Hello,

My name is Jeff Myjak and I live in Middletown, CT. Several years ago I heard about the issue of the low bottle redemption rate here in our state and I set out to do something about it, even if it is only a little. I created a program called "Cans-4-A-Cause". I wanted to give people in the Middletown area a reason not to throw away their nickels, instead give them to those who are in need. 100% of the proceeds are donated to local programs like St. Vincent de Paul, Warm the Children, Portland Food Bank, Shepherd Home and we have now set up a fund to help Veterans in the area that need emergency home heating oil.

In our first year, we collected just over 25,000 bottles and cans. In year 2, we collected over 110,000 containers. This year, we are on track to collect between 475,000 and 500,000 containers. Next year, the plan is to turn this hobby into a Non-Profit so that I can go out and get grants for collection containers to be put at local businesses. I then take these containers, sort them out and count them (very time consuming), then take them to the redemption center – Cash Can Redemption in East Hartford as we do not have a place in Middletown or nearby. The closest location is New Britain (still 15 miles away), but they are difficult to work with for my volume and more costly.

How have I done this? Through education, getting the word out about what has a deposit on it and how to redeem them. While I do appreciate the volume I am getting, my goal has been to get these redeemed and I don't want to take away from programs that rely on bottles as their fundraisers. I am going after those that are getting thrown away (either solid waste or single stream recycling). I have begun working with businesses like 360Martials Arts, 9Rounds and Minor Hills Golf Course, giving them bins for their customers to put the containers in (instead of throwing them away into their solid waste). I plan to expand this next year and create a website.

I do believe expanding the bottle bill will serve to help the environment and somewhat help the solid waste stream, increasing the deposit on soda and water will also unduly hurt low income families. Adding products like NIP bottles (although I am not sure how that would be administered), adding wine and even other glass liquor bottles would help to eliminate material ending up in the solid waste stream. We can do a lot better!! Use Maine as an example, they have the same 5 cent deposit on soda, beer and water. Wine and liquor above 50ml have a 15 cents deposit and their overall rate redemption is 84%. They have hundreds of redemption centers that except all containers and they get 4 cent handling fee (making it worth while to open up a center). Compare that to Connecticut where there are only 16 redemption centers (the redemption center in Enfield should not be considered – they take all containers, only as a as a donation for Connecticut Children's Hospital). Connecticut relies on consumers to take them to stores for redemption, but stores make it difficult for the consumer. They offer limited number of machines and they are often non-functional. They often only take back only what they sell making it more time consuming for the consumer as they have to go around from store to store trying to redeem them.

In Connecticut, we have a stakeholder that I do not believe will support a higher redemption rate – The Legislature. Where the bottle bill generates over \$36 million of state revenue they will be hard pressed to give that up. I understand that increasing deposits to 10 cents is being considered, the message coming across to the public is that this is a way to increase revenue for the state (estimates I have seen is that will raise the state revenue to \$44 million as it will only result in a 30% – 35% increase in returns). As long as the bottle bill is perceived as a revenue maker for the state, you are going to have a difficult time convincing the public that expanding the bottle bill is to help the environment.

What studies have been done to determine what products are not being returned? By that, I am referring to is soda not being returned or is it beer not being returned, or water (you would be surprised how many people don't realize there is a deposit on water bottles). And who is not returning them? Restaurants and caterers don't return them, they build the cost into the cost of doing business and throw them away (into the solid waste stream). Recreational facilities are a source of unreturned bottles (golf courses, gyms, movie theaters, etc.) as they too are throwing them into the solid waste stream.

Before increasing deposits to 10 cents, I hope that research is done to figure out the who's and why's of the poor redemption rate. A marketing campaign to increase public awareness is in order. In that campaign, a link to resources as well as a link to where people can donate their containers, similar to the one that lists the redemption centers. One final thought, a way to increase the public awareness would be to spike out deposits paid on customer receipts – similar to how sales tax is spiked out.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,
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Cans for a Cause
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