

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
 July 6, 2022  
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## **New Data Shows That 2021 Beverage Container Redemption Rates in Most U.S. Bottle Bill States Did Not Return to Pre-COVID Levels**

### ***CRI Calls for Higher Deposit Amounts and Other Bottle Bill Improvements to Reverse Declining Redemption Rate Trends***

CULVER CITY, CA, July 6, 2022 – Beverage container redemption rates in the majority of U.S. states with container deposit laws (aka bottle bills) did not rebound in 2021 after dramatic drops exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, according to data released today by the [Container Recycling Institute](#) (CRI), a national nonprofit recycling industry authority.

CRI compiled data from the deposit states (there are 10 total) for which statistics are currently available. Overall findings include the following (see the chart with full data at the end of this document):

<b>Deposit State Redemption Rate Changes from 2019 to 2020</b>	<b>Deposit State Redemption Rate Changes from 2020 to 2021*</b>
No change in New York	Increase of 6% in New York
Decrease of 1% in Hawaii	No change in Hawaii
	Decrease of 1% in California
	Changes of +/- 2% in Michigan, Vermont and Connecticut
Drops of 5% or more in Oregon, California, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Michigan (with the highest drop, at 16%)	Drop of 5% in Massachusetts

\* The Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative (OBRC), which serves a majority of the state’s beverage dealers, reported a redemption rate of 81% for 2021. The rest of Oregon’s data is required to be calculated by Aug. 1.

According to CRI President Susan Collins, the 2020 decreases generally resulted from the temporary suspension of the requirement (or of enforcement of the requirement) that retailers accept back empty deposit beverage containers; the decision by some redemption centers to temporarily close; and consumers’ adherence to shelter-in-place orders. *(Details on the impact of COVID-19 on deposit states’ beverage container redemption policies is available on CRI’s [Bottle Bill Resource Guide website](#).)*

Michigan is the only deposit state that solely uses return-to-retail, with no redemption centers. Because of this, the state’s suspension of the retailer beverage container takeback requirement from late March to mid-June 2020 meant a complete shutdown of the deposit program, leaving consumers with no options to redeem their bottles and cans. The state re-established the program in phases, and a requirement for full resumption of retailer collection activities went into effect in October 2020, with some restrictions permitted to comply with health and safety protocols.

## **Lack of Return-to-Retail Compliance in 2021**

By 2021, a year that saw strong economic growth in the U.S., in nearly all cases deposit states had reinstated policies requiring full retailer redemption activities. However, most of them did not see a marked increase in redemption rates.

Collins said, “Reports from organizations in deposit states indicate that many retail establishments simply ignored the requirement to resume taking back bottles and cans and provide consumers with the deposit fee they paid upon purchase. With spotty enforcement, regulators can only rely on consumer complaints and respond on a case-by-case basis.”

The two states with the largest redemption rate drops from 2019 through 2021 – Michigan (14%) and Massachusetts (12%) – rely solely and heavily, respectively, on return-to-retail for deposit refunds. In late June 2021, the Michigan Department of Treasury issued a reminder to retailers with bottle return facilities of the requirement to take back beverage containers, with no COVID-related restrictions – suggesting concern over compliance. In Massachusetts, it is estimated that currently only one-quarter of the retailers required to accept back bottles and cans are doing so.

Collins indicated that the uptick in redemption rates in New York and (based on partial data) in Oregon demonstrates the importance of robust bottle bill infrastructure that includes multiple, convenient ways to return beverage containers: return-to-retail (both with and without reverse vending machines, or RVMs); redemption centers; and bag drops, which proved popular even during 2020 due to their very quick, user-friendly and low-contact nature. Oregon, New York and Maine offer all three options (with bag drops in New York mainly available in the upstate area).

“Deposit return infrastructure that makes it easy to obtain refunds for empty bottles and cans clearly leads to higher redemption rates,” Collins said. “This ensures that more consumers get their deposits back and more recycled material gets into the supply chain, and that we see reductions in litter, marine debris, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.”

## **Higher Deposit Values = Higher Redemption Rates**

Along with easy-to-access bottle and can return options, Collins cited two other factors that greatly affect redemption rates: the deposit amount and the percentage of beverage containers covered.

In Michigan, even with its steep redemption rate drop from 2019-2021, the rate in 2021 stood at 75% – what Collins called the low end of a “decent” range (75%-80%) for a deposit state. Michigan and Oregon are currently the only two states with a 10-cent deposit for all of their eligible bottles and cans, with the rest of the states providing 5 cents for most beverage containers. (Connecticut’s deposit will increase from a nickel to a dime in 2024.)

“From 2013 through 2019, Michigan consistently had a redemption rate of close to 90% or more with a return-to-retail only deposit system that covers just 55% of beverage containers sold,” Collins said. “Despite the challenges of the last two years, the program’s redemption rate still ranks in the top tier among deposit states with reported data.”

She continued, “It’s clear that a higher deposit makes a significant difference, given that in the mid-1970s – around the time several deposit states enacted their programs – a nickel was worth about what 27 cents is today. When Oregon’s dime deposit went into effect in 2017, the redemption rate climbed from 64% (in 2016) to 86% in 2019. A nickel is no longer the financial incentive it once was for consumers to return beverage containers instead of throwing them away or littering them.”

Massachusetts currently sits last among bottle bill states with a redemption rate of just 38%, and only 40% of beverage containers covered by a deposit. Legislation introduced in 2021 – now before the commonwealth’s Senate Ways and Means Committee – would expand the bottle bill to include more types of beverage containers and increase the deposit from 5 cents to 10 cents.

## Steps to Reach Sustainable Redemption Levels

Even Massachusetts' disappointing redemption rate is higher than the average U.S. recycling rate of 35% for aluminum, glass and PET plastic bottles and cans combined. According to CRI's Beverage Market Data Analysis (using 2019 data), beverage containers on deposit in bottle bill states have a nominal recycling rate of 65%, compared to 25% for those not on deposit.

Collins said the pandemic's impact compounded a trend of declining redemption rates over the past several years, with most deposit states at or near historic lows because of the failure to update these programs to offer a higher deposit, cover more beverage types (particularly non-carbonated, which have grown in popularity) and create more accessible, streamlined return options.

However, she pointed to a positive development that provides an example of improvements other bottle bill states can make: In 2021, Connecticut passed the most significant bottle bill expansion legislation in the U.S. in about a decade. The upgrades, with a phased implementation scheduled for 2023-2024, include adding several beverages not covered by the current law (for a 13% increase in overall beverage unit coverage); raising the deposit value for all containers in the program from a nickel to a dime; increasing the handling fee paid to retailers/redemption center operators; and requiring more retailers to provide RVMs for beverage container returns.

Other good news is coming from California, where in May 2022 the State Senate passed a bill to add a deposit to wine and distilled spirits (liquor). (The State Assembly still must vote on it.) A CRI analysis indicates that, if implemented, this legislation would result in the recycling of more than half a billion additional bottles and cans annually.

Collins said beverage container redemption rates must reach at least 85% to be considered "sustainable." "For the sake of our climate, our oceans and our future generations, we must do more to collect high-quality recyclable bottles and cans that can be used to produce new products. Beverage container deposit laws offer a proven method to achieve this, so we must continue to add and expand these programs as we all work together to create a more circular economy."

*The nonprofit Container Recycling Institute ([www.container-recycling.org](http://www.container-recycling.org)) is a leading authority on the economic and environmental impacts of used beverage containers and other consumer product packaging. Its mission is to make North America a global model for the collection and quality recycling of packaging materials.*

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*(See next page for all available beverage container redemption rate data for deposit states.)*

Redemption Rates and Other Features of 10 U.S. State Deposit Programs													
State	Redemption Rates (a)									Amount of Deposit	% of All Beverages Covered by Deposit (b)	Beverages Covered by Deposit	Estimated Percent of Deposit Beverage Sales Recycled Via Curbside Programs (c)
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021				
Michigan	95%	94%	93%	92%	91%	89%	89%	73%	75%	10¢	55%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks, sparkling water, kombucha - Wine coolers & distilled spirits coolers	4%
Maine	90%				84%			76%		Wine & liquor ≥ 50mL: 15¢ All others: 5¢	92%	- All beverages except dairy products and unprocessed cider.	4%
Oregon	71%	68%	64%	64%	73%	81%	86%	77%		10¢	88%	- All beverages except wine, distilled liquor, dairy milk and plant-based milk, and infant formula.	4%
Vermont	76%							78%	76%	Liquor: 15¢ All others: 5¢	46%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks & sparkling water - Wine coolers - Liquor	4%
California	74%	71%	72%	72%	68%	66%	67%	62%	61%	<24 oz.: 5¢ ≥ 24 oz.: 10¢	88%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks & sparkling water - All other non-alcoholic beverages - Wine coolers & distilled spirits coolers - Excluded: milk, some juices, wine, spirits	Redemption rate reflects direct CRV redemption. In 2019, curbside and dropoff programs collected 13% of CRV beverage containers sold.
Hawaii	74%	71%	67%	65%	62%	63%	63%	62%	62%	5¢	88%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks & sparkling water - All other non-alcoholic beverages - Wine coolers & distilled spirits coolers - Excluded: milk, wine, spirits	Deposit containers collected at curbside (in Honolulu only) are included in reported statewide redemption rates; deducted here to show true refund redemption.
New York	62%	64%	65%	66%	65%	64%	64%	64%	70%	5¢	78%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks & sparkling water - Bottled water including flavored water - Wine coolers	5%
Iowa	78%			65%						5¢	63%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks & sparkling water - Wine coolers - Wine & Liquor	2016 recycling rate was 71%. An estimated 6% of containers sold are recycled through curbside & dropoff programs.
Massachusetts	66%	66%	59%	56%	57%	52%	50%	43%	38%	5¢	40%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks & sparkling water	10%
Connecticut	57%	53%	51%	49%	52%	50%	50%	44%	46%	5¢ (increases to 10¢ on 1/1/24)	77%	- Beer & malt beverages - Carbonated soft drinks & sparkling water - Bottled water - Other non-carbonated beginning 1/1/23	10%

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### Notes and sources:

(a) Sources for redemption rates (Calendar Year and Fiscal Year are both used, depending on data source): CalRecycle (reported recycling rates x supermarket & recycling center participant shares), Connecticut Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection, Hawaii State Dept. of Health, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources, Maine Beverage Association, Maine Dept. of Environmental Quality (2020 is plastics only), Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Protection, Michigan Dept. of Treasury, New York State Dept. of Taxation and Finance, Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality, Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission, Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Vermont Division of Liquor Control/802Spirits. Note: the recycling rates shown here do not correspond to those used in CRI's Beverage Market Data Analysis (2022), because our research indicates different sales numbers than those reported by CalRecycle.

(b) Percent of total beverages covered by deposit is calculated using CRI's best estimates of sales of deposit and non-deposit containers in 2019, based on our "2019 Beverage Market Data Analysis," The Container Recycling Institute, 2022. Note: the denominator (all possible beverage container types) includes dairy- and plant-based milks, and includes cartons and foil. In some cases, CRI deposit sales estimates (units sold) are different than those reported to or by the state; however, the market share of deposit vs. non-deposit containers is likely to be accurate.

(c) Data derived from Table 2-3 in "Final Report, 2008 ABA Community Survey," by R.W. Beck for the American Beverage Association, Sept. 2009. MA & IA numbers estimated with assistance from MA DEP and IA DNR staff (2019).