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IS THE BOTTLE BILL BETTER?

This past October recycling in New York took a leap forward as the Returnable Beverage Container Act, or Bottle Bill, was expanded. Since 1982, when the original Bottle Bill went into effect, it has been the state's most successful recycling and litter prevention program by decreasing roadside litter 70% and collecting an estimated 90 billion beverage containers for recycling. At the original time of passage non-carbonated drinks and bottled water were non-existent, but today they represent not only 25% of all single serve containers, but also the least recycled container in New York! The intent of the "Bigger Better Bottle Bill" was to help increase our otherwise stagnant state recycling rates and once again clean up our roadsides from discarded beverage containers.

For seven long years New York policymakers squared off against a well funded "bottler" lobby in an attempt to pass the Better Bottle Bill. Among several changes to the original bill, the "Better" bill sought to include all single serve beverage containers, increase the rate paid to redemption centers, and allow New York State to retain all unclaimed deposits instead of letting the bottlers keep them. If you were a bottler you might have been pretty mad too! Since 1982, bottlers have profited close to \$1.6 billion dollars from unclaimed deposits on carbonated beverages and beer containers!

The powerful bottler lobby argued that they needed the unclaimed deposits to defray the cost of running their recycling operations. The state fought back and said THEY needed the unclaimed deposits to invest in parks and on waste reduction and recycling programs. After several years of back and forth negotiations a compromise was reached; only water bottles will be tagged for a deposit (*so, all your flavored waters, sports drinks and Ice-T containers should go into your recycle bin*) and New York would retain 80% of all unclaimed deposits, with the remaining 20% staying with the bottlers.

This compromise made some cents for New York. With an estimated 2.5 billion water bottles sold each year, paired with a 20% unclaimed bottle rate, New York estimated that anywhere from \$100 to \$180 million dollars in NEW funding would be made available from this bill. That is a lot of MONEY; unfortunately so much money that it became very attractive to use as a plug for the state's budget deficit. In that case, it gives the impression that the state doesn't care if you don't take back your water, soda or beer containers because they get to keep part of your nickel. On a less cynical side, perhaps this piece of legislation was just the victim of poor timing; after all it did take 7 years to get it passed.

All head shaking aside, the Bigger Better Bottle Bill is about recycling and recognizing that we can do a lot better in New York. Recycled plastic bottles have an abundance of uses ranging from carpet to fleece sweaters as do aluminum and glass containers, both of which can be recycled indefinitely. Recycling is a viable industry in New York and a steady supply of recycled materials helps to create

and sustain jobs. If that fact alone isn't enough incentive to recycle, then perhaps you are fed up with New York getting creative with closing the state budget gap. The difference with the "Better" bottle bill is that we all have the choice to take our containers back for redemption and to keep our nickel's. By doing just that, we are emphasizing the true intent of the bottle bill by keeping recyclable materials out of the disposal stream.



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