

Bottle and Can Buyback Recycling Options

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

Tobie Mitchell is a recycling expert, working for the Ventura County Integrated Waste Management Division, but even she had trouble recently trying to redeem the deposits her family paid for bottles and cans. "There are so few buy-back centers that even if you can find one open, you better plan on waiting in a long line behind people with strollers, bike carts, and wagons piled high with bags of cans," she said. Last month, she waited in line nearly 30 minutes with her one bag of cans before handing off her bag to the guy behind her in line and leaving.

Curbside recycling is an easy option, and funds generated by haulers are considered during rate negotiations, so residents can derive an indirect benefit by recycling without going to a recycling center. However, the five to ten cent fee consumers pay for beverage containers is meant to be reimbursable with little recycling effort, so for many people, convenient buyback recycling is seen as a matter of basic fairness. For others, money is a necessary incentive to motivate recycling.

Last week, Consumer Watchdog, a non-profit group, released a report claiming Californians lost \$308 million in deposits last year by landfilling containers they could have redeemed. Noting State legislation requiring the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) to fine large retailers for not providing in-store bottle and can redemption in cases where there is not a nearby recycling center, Consumer Watchdog cited "lax oversight" by state regulators as one of the factors reducing recycling rates.

CalRecycle spokesperson Mark Oldfield, citing reports documenting last year's unredeemed deposits at just \$272 million, explained part of the problem in an email, noting the recycling rate for bottles and cans declined from 85 percent in 2013 to 75 percent in 2018 due in part to "global market conditions making it less profitable to run a recycling center." He also pointed to the \$1.3 billion program's successes. For example on enforcement, Oldfield pointed to a case of Walmart under-paying for containers. A CalRecycle audit found the problem, and "restitution and interest were paid."

Enforcement, Oldfield noted, is generally "on a complaint basis." One category of complaints relates to buyback centers. The following are some of the most common rules raising concerns about enforcement: Buyback centers pay 5 cents for most CRV marked containers but must pay at least 10 cents for bottles and cans 24 ounces or larger. Buyback centers must post and adhere to posted hours. Buyback centers must follow "the rule of 50," paying by count rather than by weight for up to 50 containers of each material type if customers request a count-based rather than a weight-based payment.

As for convenience, the rules are more complicated. Large retailers without a buyback center in a half-mile radius have the option of either paying for empty containers in the store or paying CalRecycle \$100 per day. According to CalRecycle's most recently posted record, in the city of Ventura, 22 stores were exempted from the \$100 per day fee because they registered with CalRecycle as redeeming containers in-store; in Camarillo, 7; in Port Hueneme, 6; in Ojai, 5; in Simi Valley, 2; in Thousand Oaks, 1; and in Oxnard, 1; with none in Moorpark, Santa Paula, and Fillmore.

Go to www.calrecycle.ca.gov/bevcontainer to find a recycling center near you. If there is not one, check <https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/PublicNotices/Documents/6850> to see if a store near you previously registered as paying for empty bottles and cans in the store. If you have a complaint about a recycling center, email complaints@calrecycle.ca.gov. For complaints about retailers email dealersigns@calrecycle.ca.gov. Alternatively, for questions or complaints, call (800) RECYCLE.

A non-profit sustainability advocacy group, The California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) would like to change the bottle bill. Senior Advisor Heidi Sanborn stated, "We believe the bottle bill needs increased producer payments that go to the buy-back centers to cover the true cost of recycling to ensure we don't close more buy-back centers and actually regain some that were lost."

Californians Against Waste, the non-profit group responsible for initiating California's bottle bill in 1986 and now leading efforts to reform it, is currently working with State Senator Henry Stern on legislation to improve bottle and can recycling. In the meantime, the complaint process is the best way to make a difference.

Report:

<https://www.consumerwatchdog.org/energy/watchdog-report-finds-california-consumers-lose-half-every-nickel-bottle-deposit>

Notes

Alternatively, for questions or complaints, call (800) RECYCLE , but do not press the prompt for “beverage container;” wait for the menu choice at the end, saying press “0” for complaints. Leave a message. CalRecycle will return call within two days.

Unredeemed deposits fund the urban conservation corps, grant programs, convenience zone incentive payments, and payments to processors. There would probably be more unredeemed deposits in California if we didn’t have so many containers illegally coming over the border from Arizona.

Incentive payments, however, amount to only fractions of a cent per container, insufficient for most small centers to overcome problems such as declining commodity prices (reflecting the fall of oil prices), rising labor costs (including health care costs), and permitting problems (often related to public complaints about noise and messes).

In 1986, when Assembly Bill 2020 passed, establishing the system for collection and distribution of recycling redemption funds, legislators intended to facilitate convenience. CalRecycle pays a handling fee to recycling centers serving as the sole redeemers of bottles and cans within a half-mile radius of large retailers, and CalRecycle contributes an additional “processing payment” to all centers handling plastic and glass bottles, according to Mark Oldfield, Communications Director for the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle).

These payments, however, amount to only fractions of a cent per container, insufficient for small centers to overcome problems. These problems include declining commodity prices (reflecting the economic slowdown in China and the fall of oil prices), rising labor costs (including health care costs), and permitting problems (often related to public complaints about noise and messes).

(800) RECYCLE don't press for "beverage container;" wait for the menu choice at the end, saying press "0" for complaints. Leave a message. They will return call within two days. 916 341 6300

Recycling center locations: calrecycle.ca.gov/bevcontainer

Eye on the Environment for 11/13/16

Decline in value makes buyback recycling less convenient

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

When you buy a bottled or canned drink in California, the container is likely covered by a state law requiring you to pay five cents for "California Redemption Value." The fee is 10 cents for bottles and cans 24 ounces or larger.

Using curbside options for recycling those containers involves sacrificing your opportunity to recover that fee, but you are essentially paying for the convenience of avoiding storage, transportation, and handling hassles. Funds obtained by curbside collectors for redemption of those recyclables are factored into formulas during their negotiations with local governments to determine the rate collectors can charge, so an individual sacrifice can serve a public purpose.

Nevertheless, according to statistics on the web site of Californians Against Waste, only about 20 percent of beverage container recycling in California occurs through curbside recycling. Small recycling centers at supermarkets account for only about 25 percent more. The majority of cans and bottles, about 55 percent, are redeemed at larger, private sector buyback recycling centers.

Recent changes have put pressure on these buyback centers, and many of the smaller ones have gone out of business. According to Wastedive.com, "rePlanet, the largest recycler in the state and partner to the region's major grocery chains, has closed 191 recycling centers and terminated nearly 300 employees."

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The loss of small recycling centers reduces convenience. For example, every week for over 10 years, Mary Barnes has been bringing her cans and bottles to a Ralphs store in east Ventura

where they had both a recycling center staffed daily and a reverse vending machine for after-hours convenience. The Ralphs closed on October 28, and the contract for the recycling center was tied to the lease of the supermarket, so one closure led to the other. She now has to drive farther, to another Ralphs, which has a small, staffed buyback center operating only limited hours in the parking lot, and no reverse vending machine.

Even large recycling centers are feeling the pinch of these problems. Matt Dorros, of Simi Valley, called to express his concerns about long lines of customers at the Simi Valley Recycling Center since the center cut its hours from seven days per week to five. The recycling center is now open only Tuesdays through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dorros says his only alternative in town is a reverse vending machine, which pays less and is often broken.

Camarillo Recycling is also a large recycling center, and this year they moved to a larger space. However they are currently looking for a tenant to sublease their extra 7,000 square foot warehouse and 4,000 square foot office at 849 Via Alondra, in Camarillo.

Rincon Recycling, once one of our county's biggest recyclers, closed its operations a few months ago. For decades, the Oxnard-based company leased balers and collected recyclables from businesses, and their local buyback center handled a variety of materials.

If your local recycling center has closed, keep your eye on the environment and keep recycling. You may have to drive a little farther and use a larger recycling center with more limited hours, or you can use the same curbside container you use of your lower-value recyclables, such as bottles and cans of milk, wine, and distilled spirits, which are not covered by redemption value program.

On the net:

<http://www.cawrecycles.org/landing>

<http://www.wastedive.com/news/californias-replanet-closes-191-recycling-centers-terminates-300-jobs/413745/>

Eco-Tip for 4/16/17 (Short version with Ventura County data)

Where's my recycling center?

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

Local recycling coordinators often field complaints about recycling buyback centers' hours or payments. Since the redemption system is administered by the state, those concerns are generally referred to the California Department of Resources Recovery and Recycling (CalRecycle), at 1-800-RECYCLE.

The most common question about rules is whether centers can pay by the pound rather than by the bottle or can. The answer is "the rule of 50." Upon customer request, recycling center

operators must pay by count rather than by weight for up to 50 containers of each material type. Over that amount, centers can choose to pay by weight or count, regardless of customer preference.

Concerns about messes or odors are best handled your city's code compliance division. Issues of scavenging and vagrancy are best reported to the police.

Regulation enforcement and economic pressures have forced some centers to close, and the lack of convenient recycling centers is drawing even more complaints.

When there is no recycling center within half a mile of a supermarket, state law requires retailers to choose between redeeming containers or paying a \$100-per-day "opt-out" fee to the state's Beverage Container Recycling Fund. In Ventura County, no stores pay this fee because 39 have told CalRecycle they redeem in-store, and others are near enough to recycling centers. Last year, CalRecycle sent letters to five additional Ventura County stores that have not stated whether they will redeem in-store or pay the fee; CalRecycle will assess the fee if they continue to not respond, according to Mark Oldfield, communications director with CalRecycle.

Long version with statewide data

Eco-Tip for 4/16/17

Where's my recycling center?

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

Public officials and local recycling coordinators often field calls from constituents complaining about recycling buyback centers. Some people complain about these businesses' hours, payments, or rules, such as when these centers are allowed to pay by the pound versus paying by the bottle or can. Since the bottle/can redemption system is administered by the State, not by local government, those concerns are often referred to the California Department of Resources Recovery and Recycling (CalRecycle), at 1-800-RECYCLE.

The answer to the most common question about payment is "the rule of 50." This means, upon customer request, the recycling center operator is required to pay by count rather than by weight for recycling up to 50 containers of each material type. Over that amount, centers can choose to pay by weight or count, regardless of customer preference.

Other concerns raised actually do relate to local government matters. Concerns about messes, odors, and related issues are best handled by your city's code compliance division. Issues of scavenging and vagrancy, also sometimes associated with buyback centers, are best reported to the police.

Complaints sometimes result in enforcement of regulations. For that reason, and also due to economic pressures, centers are closing. Consequently, people also increasingly complain about buyback center closures and a resulting lack of convenient buyback recycling.

When recycling centers close, leaving none located within a half-mile of a supermarket, state law requires retailers to choose between redeeming containers or paying a \$100-per-day "opt-out" fee to the state's Beverage Container Recycling Fund. Statewide, 143 stores choose to pay this fee rather than offer recycling, 2,646 redeem in-store, and 223 are in a "grace period" for deciding. Last year, CalRecycle sent letters to 794 additional stores reminding them of this choice and will assess the fee on non-responsive stores, according to Mark Oldfield, Communications Director with CalRecycle.