

Bigger, Better Bottle Bill Campaign

NEWS RELEASE

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GROUPS KICK OFF CAMPAIGN TO EXPAND THE BOTTLE BILL AND GENERATE NEW REVENUE FOR RECYCLING

(Albany) A statewide network of environmental, consumer, labor and civic groups launched their "Campaign for a Bigger, Better Bottle Bill in New York" at a press conference today in Albany. Representatives from the campaign joined sponsors Assemblyman Thomas P. DiNapoli and Senator Kenneth LaValle in calling on the Legislature to pass A.3922/S.1696. The speakers included Mayor Bob Elliott, from the village of Croton-on-Hudson in Westchester.

New York's Returnable Container Act (known as the "Bottle Bill") celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2003. The bottle bill has done more to control litter and spur recycling in New York than any other state or local program. Over the past 20 years, more than 75 billion bottles and cans bearing a 5-cent deposit have been returned and recycled through New York's bottle bill.

But the bottle bill needs to be brought up to date to meet New York's current and future needs. A.3922/S.1696 would amend New York's Bottle Bill in two significant ways:

1) It would expand the bottle bill to include deposits on non-carbonated beverages such as bottled water, teas, sports and juice drinks, which now represent over 20% of the beverage containers sold in New York. California, Maine and Hawaii's deposit laws also include these containers. Wine, liquor, and dairy products would remain exempt from the law. According to the Container Research Institute (CRI), a nonprofit think tank based in Arlington, Virginia, expanding New York's bottle bill will result in up to 2.5 billion additional containers recycled each year. This would also reduce litter in New York and lessen the burden on municipal solid waste programs.

2) The bill would require all unclaimed deposits to be deposited in the State's Environmental Protection Fund to support municipal recycling and waste prevention programs. CRI estimates that this would generate over \$172 million a year in new revenues for New York State: funds which are critically needed as state and local governments face unprecedented budget deficits. Since the law was passed, beverage distributors and bottlers have retained all the unclaimed deposits, reaping a windfall profit of over a billion dollars over the past twenty years. Massachusetts, Michigan and Hawai'i all require that some or all of the unclaimed deposits in their states be returned to the state to fund environmental programs.

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240 groups from across the state and more than a dozen elected officials and government bodies have endorsed the Bigger, Better Bottle Bill, including Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr.

“New York’s bottle bill has been tremendously successful at reducing litter, boosting recycling rates, and easing the burden on municipal recycling programs,” said Andy Bicking of Scenic Hudson. “But it needs to be updated to meet today’s needs.”

According to Jennifer Gitlitz of the Container Recycling Institute, “Twenty years ago, canned ice tea, sports drinks, and bottled water were barely a blip on the radar screen; now they account for over 25 billion trashed containers in the United States each year. Maine, Hawaii and California have already incorporated these drinks into their deposit laws. By updating its bottle bill, New York State will set an important example for other states.”

"Over the past twenty years, the beverage industry has reaped over a billion dollars in abandoned deposits, although the law has never said they are entitled to this money," said Laura Haight of NYPIRG. "They should do their fair share to help New York through this fiscal crisis."

"Reclaiming the tens of millions of dollars of unclaimed deposits from the beverage industry will provide critical funding for municipal recycling efforts around the state, including New York City's embattled program," said Mark Izeman, senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

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Members of the Bigger, Better Bottle Bill Campaign include:

Adirondack Mountain Club
American Farmland Trust
American Littoral Society, Northeast Chapter
Bottle and Can Redemption Association of NYS (BACRA)
Consumer Policy Institute/Consumers Union
Container Recycling Institute (CRI)
Environmental Advocates of New York
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater
INFORM
Laborers Local 108 (Recycling & General Industrial Laborers)
League of Women Voters of NYS
Mason-Tenders District Council - PAC
The Nature Conservancy
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
NYC Audubon Society
NYC Waste Prevention Coalition
New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV)
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)
NYS Association of Recycling, Reuse and Reduction (NYSAR)
Peoples' Environmental Network of New York
St. Mary's Episcopal Church
Scenic Hudson
Sierra Club
WE CAN