

Update to bottle bill sought

Wednesday, February 4, 2004

The Massachusetts Sierra Club and MASSPIRG have announced a "New Year's resolution" to campaign for the passage of an updated bottle bill. The campaign for a bottle bill update, which adds water, sports drinks, teas, juices, wine, and liquor bottles to the bottle bill, addresses a sorely needed revision to the 20-year-old law.

"We are excited to have the governor's support, per his fiscal 2005 budget proposal, in updating our 20-year old law," said James McCaffrey, Massachusetts Sierra's director.

The Massachusetts Bottle Bill has not been updated or expanded since its implementation in 1983 - except for increasing the handling fee for recycling centers and redirecting the unclaimed deposit's windfall profits to the state. The last major push for updating the bottle bill was in 1997 - when the bill failed despite overwhelming public support.

"By all accounts, the existing bill has been a huge success. Massachusetts redeems close to 70 percent of the containers covered by the bill, but we need to modernize the law to catch up with the times," said Janet Domenitz, MASSPIRG's director.

Due to changing consumer beverage habits (consumption of iced tea, bottled water, fruit juices), an increasing number of containers are finding their way to landfills. It is estimated that over 90,000 tons of beverage containers are now disposed as garbage, instead of recycled via the Bottle bill.

Although most cities and towns have curbside recycling, the bottle bill is significantly more effective in achieving recycling results. Typically, curbside only recycles 20 to 30 percent of beverage containers, the rest becoming litter or landfill. In sharp contrast, containers covered by the Bottle Bill are redeemed at about 70 percent.

"Boosting recycling rates means fewer containers will be landfilled or incinerated, more natural resources will be conserved, energy will be saved and greenhouse gases reduced. The bottle bill

already has diverted about two million tons from the waste stream over the past 20 years," said McCaffrey.

Unclaimed deposits have traditionally provided critical funding for many state recycling and environmental programs. There is currently over \$33 million dollars in annual revenue from unclaimed deposits. Under the update, an additional \$16 million would be added.

"An updated bottle bill would allow us to clean up our streets and encourages consumers to recycle," said Rep. Alice Wolf (D-Cambridge). "During these difficult fiscal times, it would provide incentives to local communities for recycling and added revenue for the commonwealth. It is sound environmental and fiscal policy, updating it makes good common sense."

"The Bottle Bill is one of our most effective tools in decreasing litter, increasing recycling, and creating cleaner communities," said Sen. Jarrett Barrios. "The Bottle Bill must be now updated to reflect changes over the last decade in the beverage preferences of consumers."

Another Bottle Bill supporter in the Senate, Senator Andrea Nuciforo, said, "The Bottle Bill has been extremely effective at providing an incentive for consumers to do the right thing. Expanding the bill to reflect the changes of consumer habits makes economic and environmental sense."

Last year, a similar measure proposed by Governor Romney drew huge public support. Over 40 environmental groups, recycling companies, and redemption centers endorsed the update.

According to Jennifer Gitlitz of the Container Recycling Institute, "Twenty years ago, 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, Massachusetts will set an important example for other states."