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# Oregon bottle bill completes first decade

Environmentalists love the bill,  
business learns to live with it

By John Hart  
Of the Emerald

Ten years after Oregon legislators decided banning throwaway bottles would help alleviate part of the litter problem in the state, environmentalists are thrilled with the results, while businessmen say they have "accepted" it. This November voters in California, Washington and two other western states will make a "bottle bill" decision, while a

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referendum to repeal a measure is scheduled in Massachusetts. A similar law is also being considered by Congress.

Oregon's law requires a minimum deposit for beverage cans and bottles and outlaws cans with pull-tab tops.

Many recycling organizations were worried about losing business when the bill was first introduced in Oregon. "We were for it from an ethical point of view," says Nancy Polley, public relations and education specialist for Begin Recycling in Natural Groups, a non-profit recycling effort in Eugene.

But the bill "has actually helped our business in some ways," she says, referring to the educational benefits of having "recyclable" printed on every can.

According to Polley, use of the word introduces people to the idea of saving our natural resources for re-use. She estimates \$200 in cans are donated to BRING each month.

Commercially-motivated recyclers have realized an increase in revenues since Oregon's bottle bill went into affect because beer and soft drink companies must discard all returns they receive from their products, says Dan Smith of Smith and Hill Recyclers.

Steve Bauder, assistant manager of the Franklin Boulevard McKay's Market, says beverage manufacturers have had ample time to adapt to it.

The major changes that had to be made included providing space - a scarce resource in the retail grocery trade - and scheduling additional hours each day to organize returns, he says.

Two changes in the bill during the last legislative session improved conditions for redemption centers. The first limits the number of containers they must accept at one time to 96, while the second allows them to refuse containers that are not clean, says Kathy Keene, vice president of the 800-member Oregon Retail Council.

Another amendment, which would establish centrally-located redemption centers, was considered during that session, and Keene says she expects it to be re-introduced during the coming session.

The idea has both supporters and opponents, Keene says. Supporters feel it would alleviate many of the problems in terms of space and time, while opponents are afraid such a measure would give unfair ad-



Photo by Jay Jollon  
A Mayfair bottle clerk deals with the product of the bottle bill - lots of empties.

vantage to such centers if they are located in areas where beverages are sold, she says.

Logistics, transportation and increased capital investment posed the greatest problems for Willamette Beverage Co., says Reagan Matsler, vice president and general manager.

The initial capital investment jumped by more than 100 percent the day the law went into effect, he says.

The company was forced to increase its warehouse space from 25,000 to 65,000 square feet. Another 17,000 square feet was added in 1979, and more trucks and man-hours were required to deliver beverage and return empties, Matsler says.

Legislators should have allowed consumer demands to dictate the industry's direction instead of blaming throwaway cans and bottles for the litter problem, he says.

Can sales dropped from 28

percent to 5 percent of gross sales in 1972, but rebounded to 35 percent by 1982, Matsler says. Thus, consumers have cans and a cleaner environment, he emphasizes.

His opposition to the bottle bill is not an attack on the benefits of the bill, Matsler says, but rather a response to legislators imposing restrictions on businesses and consumers without adequate justification.

"I would be diametrically opposed to anything that would not allow our customers to make their own choice," he says. "Business understands the need for individuality."

Business should respond to the desires of its customers rather than the dictates of legislators, Matsler says.

The teenage crews hired at taxpayers' expense to police Oregon roadways were more effective in cleaning up the environment than the bottle bill, he says.

"The Oregon bottle bill is very firm," Smith says. "It's here, and the industry has adjusted."

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