

# Oregon residents cash in on hike in bottle, can refunds

Refund doubled from 5 to 10 cents

By KRISTENA HANSEN  
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Some of the most thrifty, eco-conscious Oregon residents, each hauling hundreds of used water bottles and soda cans in trash bags and carts, flocked to bottle-recycling centers and grocery stores Saturday — the first day the per-bottle refund rate doubled to 10 cents.

Oregon was the first state in the nation to give 5-cent refunds for recycling used soda cans and glass bottles more than 45 years ago through its so-called Bottle Bill. Today, with other recycling options now commonplace, this eco-trailblazing Pacific Northwest state is hoping to revamp the program by doubling that refund on bottled and canned water, soda, beer and malt beverages — regardless what their labels say.

The most frugal of Oregonians have been hoarding bottles for months in anticipation of the roll-out. Even the press pool at the state Capitol in Salem has been buying cases of water bottles and stockpiling the empties to pay for a pizza party.

Many grocery stores and the 20 or so bottle redemption sites across the state were bustling with activity, as expected, on Saturday.

## Steady traffic

A newly-built BottleDrop redemption site in north Portland had heavy foot traffic steadily throughout the day that employees say is usually only seen during peak hours on the typical Saturday.

Portland resident Sarah Marshall says she and her brother come to the BottleDrop location about once a month. This time, though, she says they'll walk away with about \$75, which helps pay for things like gas and various errands.

Oregon's 1971 Bottle Bill, groundbreaking for its era in combating litter, has been replicated in nine other states plus the U.S. territory of Guam. Michigan is the only other with an across-the-board payout as high as 10 cents per bottle, although booze and other large bottles carry a 10-cent payout in California and 15 cents in Maine and Vermont.

The system was a big hit in those initial years. But as curbside recycling and pickup services were brought on board two decades later — not to mention inflationary effects on the nickel's value — the rates



AP Photo/Kristena Hansen

Residents formed steady lines at a BottleDrop recycling redemption center in Portland on Saturday, the first day the refund rate for empty water bottles, beer bottles and soda cans jumped to 10 cents.

at which Oregonians cashed in their bottles and cans gradually tumbled from 90 percent averages to under 70 percent of all bottle sales statewide in 2014 and 2015.

## Triggered by decline

That decline thus triggered the new 10-cent rate — a provision that lawmakers added in 2011 to the Bottle Bill in 2011.

Naysayers, meanwhile, are quick to criticize the higher amount as bad policy during a time of crisis for Oregon's upcoming budget, where jobs and taxes are on the line to help close a whopping \$1.6 billion deficit.

Among the 10 Bottle Bill states, Oregon and Iowa differ in that private beverage industry, rather than state government, operates their bottle programs and claims all the unredeemed refunds.

Oregonians cashed in slightly more than 1 billion bottles and cans in 2015, roughly two-thirds of total sales that year, according to a report to

the Legislature by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, which aids distributors in administering program operations. The remaining third equates to almost \$30 million in gross unredeemed refunds claimed by local and national distributors such as Pepsi, Pendleton Bottle Co. and Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative participants.

Some of those funds help beverage distributors operate the program that involves transporting recyclables to processing sites and reimbursing grocery stores, which don't make a profit but are still required to accept empty containers and refund consumers.

## Unclaimed cash

But critics like Dan Meek, a Portland attorney and Oregon Progressive Party spokesman, said at least some of that unclaimed cash should go into state coffers for education, health care or other public services.

More recently, distributors

participating in the Oregon co-op are using the funds to build, operate and staff upscale stand-alone redemption sites like the Bottle Drop location in north Portland, which relieves nearby grocery stores of the responsibility. The process has been slow-going, however, with pushback from local communities and land-use issues, although the co-op is now retrofitting huge shipping containers as an alternative.

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, a Democrat from Scappoose, said the co-op's slow building and shift away from some grocery retailers have been among her concerns for smaller communities like hers. But she and others respect that it's part of Oregon's identity.

"The rationale was, we don't want this crap all over the roads and the beach, it's gross. And so if you give them money to take them back some place, everybody wins," she said.

# Expansion of self-serve gas heads to state Senate

Bill does not include Clatsop

By PARIS ACHEN  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A bill to expand the hours of self-serve gas stations in rural counties in Eastern Oregon is headed to the state Senate, after the House unanimously passed it last week.

The bill allows 24-hour self service at stations in certain counties. Those stations would still be required to have attendants between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., however.

The legislation by state Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, expands on a law passed in 2015 that allowed self-service between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. in 18 counties with a population of less than 40,000. The idea was to protect travelers from being stranded in remote places.

Oregon is one of only two states that prohibit customers

from pumping their own gas at fueling stations. The other is New Jersey.

In Eastern Oregon, some locally owned gas stations have been at risk of closure due to the expense of hiring fueling attendants to pump customers' gas, Bentz said.

"We are trying to preserve these stations out in the middle of nowhere so that we have fuel available," Bentz said earlier this month.

The proposed change affects 15 counties in Eastern Oregon: Malheur, Union, Wasco, Hood River, Jefferson, Crook, Baker, Morrow, Lake, Grant, Harney, Wallowa, Gilliam, Sherman and Wheeler.

The original proposal included Clatsop, Curry and Tillamook counties. However, opposition to expanding self-service hours prompted proponents to carve out those coastal counties. Opponents feared the change would threaten the jobs of those who pump fuel for a living.

APRIL 6

## Pulitzer Prize Winning Author and Journalist Buzz Bissinger

A Columbia Forum Presentation



Buzz Bissinger is among the nation's most honored and distinguished writers. A native of New York City, Buzz is the winner of the Pulitzer Prize, the Livingston Award, the American Bar Association Silver Gavel Award and the National Headliners Award, among others. He is also a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He is the author of the highly acclaimed nonfiction books: Friday Night Lights, A Prayer for the City, Three Nights in August, Shooting Stars and Father's Day.

Buzz has been a reporter for some of the nation's most prestigious newspapers; a magazine writer with published work in Vanity Fair, The New York Times Magazine and Sports Illustrated; and a co-producer and writer for the ABC television drama NYPD Blue. Two of his works were made into the critically acclaimed films: Friday Night Lights and Shattered Glass. Three more are in active development. Friday Night Lights also served as the inspiration for the television series of the same name.

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