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## N.J. may want to give you a 10-cent refund for returning bottles and cans

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7–8 minutes

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Are you more likely to recycle a can of soda if you knew you would get money back to do it? That’s what some lawmakers are hoping.

State legislators are currently mulling a new bill that would create a 10-cent bottle and can return system in New Jersey like those already [in place in several states](#).

Customers would ostensibly collect on a refundable deposit when they return bottles and cans for recycling, according to [a draft of the proposal introduced May 6](#).

In New York, customers similarly pay a five cent deposit when buying bottles or cans and their deposit is refunded when they return the container to a retailer or distributor to be recycled.

“The 10 states that have a ‘deposit return system’ recycle significantly more than those that do not,” said Marta Young, a New Jersey-based zero-waste specialist with Clean Water Action.

“A 10-cent return on beverage containers would enable New Jersey to achieve higher recycling rates as the containers would be [‘single-streamed’](#) and therefore would not be discarded as waste.”

Not everyone's on board here, however.

New Jersey's bill as written would apply to bottles, cans, carton pouches and aseptic packaging (like juice boxes) made from materials such as plastic, glass, paper, cardboard or metal (or a combination of those materials) and are no more than one gallon. It would not apply to beverage cups.

Businesses that fail to follow the bottle return system could face penalties of between \$100 and \$1,000.

Linda Doherty, president and CEO of the [NJ Food Council](#), on Tuesday called the bottle bill in essence "a tax" on shoppers.

"As an example, a case of 24 beverages amounts to \$2.40 in a beverage tax," Doherty said. "NJ time-strapped shoppers do not want to bring their trash back to the grocery store to collect change when they can easily dispose of their cans and bottles curbside because of mandatory recycling laws."

She also said as more people rely on delivery services for their shopping now, they may not be able to get back to the store to redeem their beverage containers and "will be stuck" paying the new fee.

Doherty's organization, which represents about 1,400 supermarkets, independent grocers, and convenience stores, has spoken out against [past iterations of the bill](#).

The [law would require](#) the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to establish "beverage container redemption centers" throughout New Jersey to ease the bottle return process.

Each of those centers would have to be open seven days a week

for at least 10 hours a day from Monday through Saturday, and for at least 6 hours a day on Sunday. Customers would still be encouraged to return bottles where they are purchased.

State Sens. Raj Mukherji, D-Hudson, and Andrew Zwicker, D-Middlesex, who [sponsored the latest bottle bill](#), could not immediately be reached for comment Tuesday.

State Sen. Bob Smith, D-Middlesex, who supported the law to ban [plastic bags](#), also co-sponsored the latest legislation.

The bill, which was referred to the Senate Environment and Energy Committee which Smith chairs, will likely be deliberated upon in June. It was [up for discussion](#) by the committee on Monday but was pulled from the agenda.

It would have to be passed by both houses of the state Legislature — the Senate and Assembly — and signed by the governor to become law.

## **Pros and cons**

In the mid-1980s, New Jersey legislators considered a similar bottle deposit bill but later opted for a broader litter and recycling program.

Efforts also came and went in [2008](#), [2010](#) and [2016](#).

The NJDEP [held a virtual session in March to discuss](#) the latest proposal and hear from experts.

Young, of Clean Water Action, said most beverage containers end up co-mingled with other trash, in the ocean or ultimately littered in public places or burned in incinerators resulting in health problems.

Clean Water Action [cited a study by nonprofit Reloop](#) that found [the beverage recycling rate](#) in states with a bottle deposit systems was about 60% and those without such systems was roughly 24%.

In its [first-year report](#) on New Jersey's plastic bag ban, the Plastics Advisory Council or PAC — created to study the restrictions — did not fall one way or another on the bottle bill.

“The PAC is aware of renewed interest in this issue from some stakeholders, and therefore believes it prudent to study these issues in an effort to assess other state frameworks and associated cost impacts for consumers and consider whether a consistent and workable framework is possible,” wrote the council, which is due to release its second-year report soon.

“The PAC agreed to study the 10 states which have historically implemented bottle bills as part of its second-year work plan and consider making recommendations to the DEP and Legislature,” the group said.

The advisory council also pointed to the New Jersey Clean Communities program — a statewide litter-abatement program created by the 1986 passage of the Clean Communities Act. Money from that program, they said, generates about \$20 million a year for municipalities to reduce litter.

Doherty, of the NJ Food Council, said a new bottle return system would be “onerous” for grocers and it may be difficult to prevent people from Pennsylvania from returning bottles to New Jersey for the 10-cent redemption.

Another challenge, critics say, has come in the form of fraud. [New York in October launched](#) new efforts to prevent “returnable container schemes” and Connecticut [has worked to fend off](#)

[recycling scams](#) of its own.

But supporters of the return system have held firm — noting that a new bottle bill will prove to further reduce plastic like the bag ban.

Officials in New York, for instance, noted that its bottle bill ensures an average of five billion beverage containers — or 250,000 tons of plastic, glass, and aluminum — are recycled annually.

The Solid Waste Association of North America, [recently speaking on deposit return systems](#) for single-use beverage containers, said it believes they “increase the collection on of used beverage containers by incentivizing the return of the containers through a financial mechanism, leading to increased collection rates and a corresponding reduction in liter.”

Besides passing the Senate, New Jersey’s newest bottle bill would also need to clear the state Assembly before arriving at Gov. [Phil Murphy](#)’s desk for consideration.

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