Understanding a Potential Recycling Refund Program

Background Information for Washington Residents

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) is studying whether a recycling refund program (sometimes called a bottle bill or deposit return system) could help improve recycling, reduce litter, and make it easier for people to return bottles and cans in Washington State. A recycling refund program means people pay a small deposit when buying certain beverages and then receive the deposit back when they return the empty container for recycling.

Ecology also conducted a modeling study to estimate where return sites could be located and how travel distance, population patterns, and service types might affect access. Possible return sites included places such as grocery stores or shopping centers, transit hubs, community facilities, or other places people already visit as part of daily routines.

Depending on a communities unique needs, they may need different types of return options. Ecology is now talking with residents across Washington to learn what would be most convenient for their specific communities. This feedback will help shape recommendations to the state legislature by January 2027.

Why Your Perspective Matters

Residents experience recycling and container return in daily life. How you travel, shop, commute, and recycle can help Ecology understand what is convenient in real life, not just in a study.

Topics We Are Discussing With Community Members

- What you do with empty bottles and cans now
- How transportation and daily errands shape what feels convenient
- How far you would be willing to travel
- What types of return sites you prefer (see additional information on next page)
- How deposits and refunds might affect your household budget
- Benefits or concerns for your community
- What would make returning containers feel worth it

What is a Recycling Refunds Program?

A recycling refund program (also called a “bottle bill”) means:

- Consumers pay a deposit when they buy a beverage.
- They get that deposit back when they return the empty container to a redemption site. This can be in the form of cash or digital payment.

This creates a reason to recycle more and throw away less.

For questions, contact Kara Steward

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Examples of Types of Redemption Sites

Express drop site: A location where people can quickly drop off containers and receive their refund later through an electronic account. Express drop sites may include bag drops or machines for people to make their returns.

Express flex site: A small site where containers are counted on site. These sites usually include a kiosk that can distribute refunds on site or electronically. Express flex sites are designed for fewer containers and work well in small spaces, very busy areas, remote communities, or islands.

Staffed redemption center:
A permanent location with staff who help count containers, provide refunds on site or electronically, and assist people dropping off.

Mobile or pop-up site: A temporary or traveling site set up at events or local gathering places. These help serve areas without nearby permanent locations.

Want to Learn More or Stay Involved?

Information about surveys, meetings, and the public comment period will be shared through Ecology's website and community partners.

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/ecology-stay-informed to stay informed!

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