Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs
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Guide to the 1983 Bottle Bill for Consumers

This fact sheet summarizes consumer rights and responsibilities under the Massachusetts Beverage Container Law or "Bottle Bill." The law, which took effect in January 1983, has proven effective in controlling litter and conserving natural resources. See M.G.L. Chapter 94, Sections 321-327, and 301 CMR 4.00 to learn more.

What beverages and containers are subject to the law?

Glass, plastic, metal, aluminum, and bi-metal containers holding beer and other malt beverages, carbonated soft drinks, and mineral waters are subject to the law. All must carry deposit labels before they are sold.

What beverages and containers are exempt from the law?

Wine, dairy products, natural fruit juices, non-carbonated drinks, and alcoholic beverages other than beer and malt beverages are exempt from the law. Containers holding more than two gallons of liquid also are exempt.

What is the minimum refund value for containers?

Containers must have a refund value of at least five cents each. Dealers/sellers of full containers must redeem empty containers of the same product brands, types, and sizes for full redemption value. Dealers or redemption centers may accept containers of brands, types, and sizes they do not sell for less than five cents.

Where can I return empty beverage containers?

Residents may return empty containers to retail outlets that sell or sold within the past 60 days the same product brands, types, and sizes, or to redemptions center that accepts them. Retail outlets must redeem containers for full redemption value. Redemption centers may choose which containers they will accept and deduct processing fees from refunds.

Do I need to clean containers before returning them?

Containers must not contain any flowing liquid and must be free of foreign materials such as cigarettes, matches, sticks, papers, etc. Retailers may not require that containers be washed before they are redeemed.

Are beverage containers still redeemable if they are damaged or broken?

Retailers may refuse to redeem containers that are substantially altered from their original shapes. Retailers who take dented cans may return them to distributors for refunds. These cans must be easily identifiable and reasonably intact. Redemption Centers may set their own criteria acceptance or rejection criteria. Returnable, non-refillable glass bottles may be refused for deposit if they are broken, but not if they are chipped. Reusable,

refillable glass bottles may be refused if they are chipped or incapable of holding liquid. Bottles do not have to be returned with caps to qualify for deposit refunds.

What obligations do retailers have in accepting containers?

Retailers must redeem empty containers whenever they are open for business. There is no such restriction on redemption centers. Restaurants charging deposits on containers for on-premises consumption or takeout must redeem empty containers. Restaurants do not have to redeem empty containers if they sell beverages for on-premises consumption and do not charge deposits. Vending machine operators must redeem containers on-site or post conspicuous notices indicating where and from whom refunds may be obtained. Notices do not have to specify the distance from vending machines to refund locations. If you encounter a business that is not complying with any of these requirements, you may register a complaint by calling 617-556-1054.

Is there a limit on the number of containers that can be returned at one time?

A retailer is only required to accept 120 containers per day from any one person, but may choose to accept more. There is no such restriction on redemption centers.

How must refunds be given?

A retailer must give cash or a slip redeemable for cash at the cash register. No store credit slips are allowed.

Can deposits be charged on cardboard cases?

The law does not address this issue. Retailers or distributors may charge refundable deposits for cardboard cases as they may for any other product so long as they do not violate another state statute or regulation.

Can minors return empty beer containers?

Any package store that allows minors on the premises for any reason such as to buy soda, candy or snacks must redeem empty beer containers from them. If a package store does not allow minors on the premises, it does not have to allow minors to redeem empty containers.

Are there penalties for not complying with the law?

Anyone who violates the law may be subject to a civil penalty of up to $1,000 for each violation. The Attorney General and local district attorneys are responsible for enforcing the provisions of the law.

Can out-of-state containers be redeemed?

Anyone who attempts to redeem empty beverage containers that s/he knows or has reason to know were not originally sold in Massachusetts as filled beverage containers is subject to civil penalties of $100 for each container or $25,000 for each tender of containers, whichever is greater.