

PLASTIC DRINKING BOTTLES – HOW TO INCREASE MORE P.E.T PLASTIC RECYCLING

Issue

Many plastic bottles end up comprising products that cannot subsequently be recycled (e.g., carpet, plastic chairs, and other products) and therefore end up in landfills. Additionally, plastic bottles are not made from recycled plastic materials since there is no requirement to do so federally or provincially. Recycling bottles is also time consuming and the ways to receive payment is outdated.

Background

Many bottles aren't recycled at all, and those that do get recycled usually aren't turned into other bottles or recycled again after that. Instead, they end up in the world's landfills — or worse, in the ocean. In Canada, plastic bottles and cans were the top plastic trash items collected during shoreline cleanups in 2019¹, just behind cigarette butts.

The compound used to make beverage bottles is polyethylene terephthalate or P.E.T. Although PET is easily recyclable, it often does not get recycled. Companies that manufacture plastic bottles (e.g., Nestle, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Starbucks, and Tim Hortons) have not made significant strides in reducing plastic production.

Currently, recycled plastic bottles are not turned into bottles but instead into fibre as a result of contamination of the recycled product from things like labels and organic waste. Bottle-to-bottle recycling also uses more energy and financial resources to turn the bottles back into bottles versus turning them into carpet or clothing, for example². Once the product is recycled from a bottle to carpet or other fibre-based material, it will inevitably end up in the landfill.

The Federal³, Provincial⁴, Regional, and some Municipal⁵⁶ Governments have begun crafting a ban on single-use plastics, which was a policy submitted and advocated for by the Surrey Board of Trade⁷; however, this does not include a program that will increase the recycled material used in plastic bottles, another major cause of pollution and environmental degradation.

The BC Government has expanded the deposit-refund system to cover all beverage containers and are changing the deposit-refund to 10 cents for all containers. Most plastic beverage containers sold today have a 5-cent deposit and are frequently discarded, yet beverage containers with a 10-cent deposit,

¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/greenpeace-plastic-brand-audit-1.5314739>

² <https://www.recyclingtoday.com/article/recycled-pet--should-it-be-used-in-making-new-bottles/>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/news/2020/10/canada-one-step-closer-to-zero-plastic-waste-by-2030.html>

⁴ <https://cleanbc.gov.bc.ca/plastics/#:~:text=Bans%20on%20single%2Duse%20packaging,polluting%20our%20environment%20and%20waterways.&text=For%20example%2C%20the%20City%20of,out%20containers%20beginning%20in%202020.>

⁵ <https://vancouver.ca/green-vancouver/single-use-items.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.surrey.ca/services-payments/waste-collection/single-use-item-reduction-strategy>

⁷ <https://businessinsurrey.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SBOT-Resolution-on-Plastics-FINAL-1.pdf>

such as beer cans/ bottles, are returned more often by consumers⁸. BC is also modernizing recycling regulations to allow electronic refunds to be paid instead of cash, improving convenience⁹.

Although some cities have a few recycling depots, they are not convenient. Having recycling facilities for small returns such as a bottle or two at convenient locations such as gas stations or convenience stores will increase the likelihood that bottles will be recycled. There are also examples of recycling machines that will provide a payout for bottles you insert, automatically cleaning the bottle to be reused.¹⁰

To ensure that companies are doing their fair share, they should be required to use a minimum amount of recycled content in their bottles.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Support private sector recycling industry by incentivizing the private sector to invest in smart recycling locations that will automatically provide refunds for bottles recycled; and,
2. Work with the Federal Government to legislate a requirement for new plastic bottles to have a minimum amount of recycled P.E.T material.

Submitted by the Surrey Board of Trade

⁸https://cleanbc.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/436/2019/08/CleanBC_PlasticsActionPlan_ConsultationPaper_07252019_B.pdf

⁹https://cleanbc.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/436/2019/08/CleanBC_PlasticsActionPlan_ConsultationPaper_07252019_B.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.tomra.com/en/collection/reverse-vending/deposit-return-schemes>