

DEPOSIT/RETURN: AN INCENTIVE TO RECYCLE

Israel's Deposit Law promises to be a first step in a comprehensive approach to litter control and resource conservation

It was years in coming. It requires expansion. But the fact remains that Israel's Deposit Law on Beverage Containers has finally come into force.

The advantages associated with the law are numerous:

- It is an environmental law which is supported by the public.
- It implements the "polluter pays" principle.
- It advances cleanliness and reduces litter.
- It advances public awareness of cleanliness and recycling.
- It diverts waste from landfills for recycling and reuse and thus conserves scarce land resources.
- It facilitates the operation of collection and recycling systems without additional government allocations.

Perhaps most importantly, the law gives ordinary citizens the ability to take responsibility for their environment.

The Law

The Deposit Law on Beverage Containers was first passed in April 1999 following years of staunch opposition. It was amended in August 2000 at the request of industrialists. Its implementation was subsequently postponed from March 2001 to October 1st in order to give beverage producers and distributors sufficient time to organize and prepare.

The law covers all beverage containers which are larger than 150 milliliters and smaller than 1.5 liters. Consumers pay a 25 agorot (about 6 cents) deposit on each beverage container they buy, which can then be reclaimed when the empty container is returned. The system does not apply to paper or cardboard containers or to plastic bags.

The assumption of the law is that those who profit from the production and sale of bottled beverages should be responsible for the litter they create. The idea is to make producers responsible for the "cradle to grave" management of their product.

The law has three main objectives:

- To improve cleanliness and reduce litter
- To reduce waste quantities and landfill volume
- To encourage recycling and reuse of beverage containers

Although the targeted containers – between 700-900 million - constitute about 60% of the total beverage containers used in Israel, they only make up about 4% of municipal waste and 8% of the volume. However, based on the experience of other countries, it is believed that the new law will have added benefits as well: reduction of litter and improvement in overall cleanliness in public areas, reduction in the amount of

material destined for landfills, promotion of container recycling through both curbside recycling and beverage container deposits, and, not least of all, fostering a recycling ethic among Israelis.

Facts and Data: Beverage Containers in Israel

Type	Total Number (million/year)	Number of Containers under the law (million/year)	Weight of containers under the law (tons/year)	Volume of containers under the law (million liters)
Plastic	600	200	10,000	100,000
Glass	460	460	115,000	230,000
Cans	300	300	6,000	100,000
Total	1,360	950	131,000	430,000

Around the World

Countries in Europe, states in the United States and other countries such as Australia have adopted bottle deposit laws. Israel's recycling law is modeled on legislation in Scandinavia.

A look at deposit laws in the USA shows that deposit laws have had a substantial effect on reducing the amount of material destined for landfills and on reducing litter and conserving resources. Beverage container return rates are high in most states that have enacted deposit laws – an average of 80% - in comparison to 40% in states that have not enacted such laws.

Reduction in Littering in the USA as a result of Bottle Deposit Laws

State	Reduction of litter by beverage containers (%)	Reduction of litter in general (%)
New York	70-80	30
Oregon	83	47
Vermont	76	35
Maine	69-77	34-64
Michigan	84	41
Iowa	76	39

Deposit Laws Worldwide

Country	Date Implemented	Containers Covered	Amount of Deposit	Recovery Rate
USA 11 States	1971 1987	All beverage containers	\$0.1-0.05	60-85%
Denmark	1989	Beer and soft drinks require refilling (ban on non-refillable)	\$0.27-0.78	Beer & soft drinks – 99.5% Refillable PET-99%

		containers)		Wines & liquors – 60-80%
Finland	1990	One-way containers	\$0.11-0.45	Non-refillable – 75% Refillable – 95-98%
Netherlands	1993	Non-refillable and refillable	\$0.16<0.5 liters \$0.72>0.5 liters	Over 98% Refillables – 15-25 trips
Norway	1974 1994	Non-refillable and refillable	\$0.16<0.5 liters \$0.40<0.5 liters	Light drinks – 98% Beer – 98% Liquors – 60%
Sweden	1982 1993	Aluminum containers and glass Refillable PET	\$0.07-0.24 \$0.56	Non-refillable PET-40% Refillable PET - 75% Glass – 45% Aluminum cans – 91%

The Recycling Corporation

A Recycling Corporation was born along with the Deposit Law. This non-profit corporation represents some 85% of the country's producers of beverage containers and supermarket chains. It is responsible for the logistics of the new system: purchasing and placing the automatic machines for the collection of plastic, metal and glass containers in major supermarket chains throughout the country, collecting the containers from supermarkets and grocery stores, and transporting the containers to recycling facilities. The corporation will be financed by the difference between the deposit paid by the public and the refunds which are redeemed.

The theory appears viable, but the results thus far have been confusing. As a result of last minute attempts by industry to postpone implementation of the law, most retailers were not ready to accept the empty bottles on October 1st. Furthermore, for a variety of reasons, the corporation only started to work weeks after the law went into effect.

However, within a month of implementation of the law, problems are slowly being overcome. Retailers are beginning to accept empty beverage containers. The Recycling Association has set up 34 collection centers around the country where retailers can bring bottles for redemption, as a first step. Four automatic machines that accept plastic, glass and aluminum containers and give out NIS 0.25 vouchers that can be exchanged for cash have been placed in selected stores as part of a 24-machine pilot project. A tender for 500 automatic machines has been published.

Carrot and Stick

Israel's recycling revolution was launched with a wide-scale public information campaign designed to acquaint Israelis with the new deposit/return scheme. The

information campaign, under the slogan “Recycling is Clean Profit” was launched simultaneously on radio, television and press. Both the ordinary citizen and the grocery store owner were shown how to implement the law.

Nevertheless, implementation was off to a slow start. A stick was necessary to show that delays and violations would not be tolerated. In a well-publicized surprise visit to a Tel Aviv supermarket, two weeks after the law came into effect, the Minister of the Environment himself brought several empty bottles to a cashier, asking for a refund on his deposit. The confused cashier summoned the assistant manager who informed the minister that the store does not accept empty bottles. The store representative was soon made aware of his error when two members of the ministry’s Green Police warned him that he was violating the law and could be prosecuted.

Subsequently, the ministry initiated a nationwide campaign of surprise visits to supermarkets by plain-clothed members of the Green Police force, aimed at catching storeowners violating the new law. The fines range from six times the deposit amount (NIS 1.5) per container to a maximum fine of NIS 19,300 (\$4600). In case of an indictment, the sums can reach between NIS 49,800 to 150,000 and violators may face up to three years imprisonment.

And on a Positive Note...

A look at similar program worldwide shows that nearly all were initially opposed by industrialists and by the beverage industry. Yet all have proved successful. All, moreover, continue to enjoy strong public support. It is up to the Israeli public in Israel to demonstrate the same level of support if the new initiative is to succeed.

In order to assess public readiness before the Deposit Law came into effect, a public survey was undertaken. The results were promising:

- 26% of the public heard of the Deposit Law
- 74% were aware of recycling
- 89% stated that it is important to recycle beverage containers
- 74% declared that they would return the containers covered by the law.
- 62% of the public that has bins for plastic bottles in its vicinity uses them (44% of the entire population).

Minister of the Environment Tzachi Hanegbi is determined to launch a recycling revolution in Israel. He has placed waste recycling and waste reduction at the top of his agenda. As the new law came into effect the minister declared: “The Israeli public is ready to undertake a process which will place the country on par with some of the most advanced countries in the field of recycling. Our function: to underline the importance of the recycling revolution and assure that all systems do what is necessary to implement the new law efficiently.”

The Deposit Law is the first environmental law in Israel which can be enforced by each and every resident. It allows the Israeli public to take an active part in the country’s recycling revolution, to undertake environmental activity and to advance education toward such values as resource conservation, cleanliness and environmental responsibility. The law also involves corporations, industrial plants, producers,

importers and distributors in environmental action – from large chains and corporations to local groceries. All are expected to take part in fulfilling the aims of the law.

Today, the deposit/return system is not yet running smoothly. Automated machines are not in place, grocery store owners are not ready to transport the bottles and cans to collection centers, consumers are confused. These are the birth pangs of the new law.

Tolerance and understanding are essential during the difficult birth process. If the law is to succeed in Israel, as it has elsewhere in the world, all partners in the new scheme must do all in their power to facilitate the birth of a recycling revolution in Israel