One-Day Beverage Container Sand Art Design at Southern CA Beach Demonstrates Need for a Sea Change in Recycling Strategies

Dolphin-Shaped Installations Show the Average Numbers of Beverage Containers Wasted and Recycled Per Person Annually

HERMOSA BEACH, CALIF., Sept. 19, 2018 – The Container Recycling Institute (CRI) this week created its second annual one-day beverage container sand art installation at Hermosa Beach Pier in Southern California. The international recycling authority’s project comes at a time of declining U.S. recycling rates and amid a rising tide of concern over the growing amount of litter that reaches our oceans.

Data show that an average of more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the 839 beverage bottles, cans and cartons used on average per American annually get wasted, and only 32 percent get recycled. So one dolphin-shaped art design included 572 beverage containers to reflect the number wasted per person per year, while another, smaller dolphin design included 263 containers – the much lower number that get recycled per person annually.*

A dolphin-shaped sand art installation by the Container Recycling Institute highlights that out of the average of 839 beverage containers each American uses annually, only 32 percent get recycled. Photo credit: Todd W. Johnson

Access a time-lapse video of the beverage container sand art installation here [https://vimeo.com/339222131]
CRI President Susan Collins noted that U.S. beverage container recycling rates have declined by five points (from 37 percent to 32 percent) over the last few years. U.S. container deposit laws – in which consumers pay a deposit when they purchase eligible beverage containers, and receive the deposit back when they return the empty containers to a certified redemption location – deliver much higher recycling rates, ranging from 51 percent to 91 percent, but only 10 states have these laws on the books.

However, container deposit laws are on the rise around the world. In 2017, 307 million people across the globe lived in locations with deposits, and by the end of 2019, that number is expected to jump to 500 million due to the implementation of new laws in the United Kingdom, the state of Maharashtra in India, and a few states in Australia.

Collins added, “Using only single-stream curbside recycling (blue bins) fails to achieve even half of the recycling rate of container deposit laws. While curbside programs should be part of the recycling equation, because 30 percent to 50 percent of beverage containers are consumed away from home, residential programs alone can’t possibly be expected to produce high recycling rates.”

**The Proven Success of Bottle Bills**

Container deposit laws, also called bottle bills, clearly make a difference in recycling rates. Data show:

- The 10 bottle bill states include only 28 percent of the U.S. population, yet account for nearly half (46 percent) of all beverage containers recycled nationwide.**
- The overall recycling rate for bottles and cans with a deposit is 59 percent, compared to only 22 percent for bottles and cans without a deposit.**

Collins pointed out many of the benefits of every new container deposit program:

- Dramatic reductions in litter and marine debris
- Reductions in energy use and greenhouse gas emissions due to fewer containers that need to be made from virgin materials
- Additional jobs in recycling
- More high-quality scrap for manufacturers
- Extra income for consumers, charities and community groups

CRI created its beverage container dolphin-shaped art installation at the beach because beverage containers often get washed into the ocean, creating a significant risk to both water quality and sea life. Plastic ingested by fish makes its way up the food chain, even creating the possibility of human consumption. The statistics are dire:

- A quarter-ton of plastic enters the world’s oceans every second. *(Sky Ocean Rescue)*
- At current rates, oceans will contain more plastics than fish (by weight) by 2050. *(Ellen MacArthur Foundation report)*

An Australian study published in the February 2018 issue of *Marine Policy*, titled “Economic incentives reduce plastic inputs to the ocean,” found 40 percent less coastal container litter in both U.S. and Australian states with container deposit laws. According to the study abstract, “These results provide strong evidence that fewer beverage containers end up as mismanaged coastal waste in states that provide a cash refund for returned beverage containers.”

**The Solutions to Declining Recycling Rates**

Despite the quantifiable benefits of container deposit laws, the U.S. is facing challenges on this front. Recycling rates are dropping in all states with bottle bills except Oregon – which after increasing its deposit from 5 cents to 10 cents last year saw its recycling rate jump from 64 percent to 82 percent.

“There are several factors involved, including that the 5-cent deposit for most containers in bottle bill states is no longer enough,” Collins said. “A nickel today is worth less than 1 cent compared to what it was in 1971, when Oregon passed the first 5-cent container deposit law in the nation.”
Collins added, “A nationwide 10-cent deposit likely would lead to recycling rates of 80 percent to 90 percent, resulting in the additional recycling of more than 10 million tons of bottles, cans, cartons and other containers over 2015 recycling levels. In terms of greenhouse gas emissions, this would have the same impact as taking 1.7 million cars off the road each year.

“Recycling rates actually must edge above 90 percent to be considered ‘sustainable.’ Effective container deposit systems represent a proven way to make this happen, as well as to do what’s right for the planet and for future generations.”

The Container Recycling Institute is a leading authority on the economic and environmental impacts of used beverage containers and other consumer product packaging. Its mission is to make North America a global model for the collection and quality recycling of packaging materials.

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*The need to round percentages creates a slight difference in the sum total of wasted versus recycled beverage containers.

**CRI estimates are based on a comprehensive study of 2015 public and proprietary data, updated with 2016 data factors that have been publicly announced.