



To: Members of the Senate Committee on Finance
Fr: Paul Burns, VPIRG
Re: The benefits of having glass bottles go to the Bottle Bill Program
Dt: May 3, 2022

There are considerable benefits to including more glass – like glass wine bottles - in the Bottle Bill program. Your colleagues in the House and in other committees have already heard testimony to this effect from stakeholders including solid waste districts, the glass recycling industry, environmental organizations, and multiple redemption centers.

Bottle Bill Glass is Cleaner

The Bottle Bill yields glass that is cleaner and more valuable than glass collected in single-stream curbside systems. This is because glass collected through the Bottle Bill is clean and is readily available for highest and best use recycling. By contrast, single stream systems tend to break and contaminate the glass from the moment it gets picked up. It is crushed and mixed with plastic, paper, glass of other colors and other materials. The crushed glass is also embedded in other materials like cardboard, and the value of all of the materials is reduced. The glass that is salvageable needs significantly more cleaning to be suitable for a high-value use like bottle-to-bottle recycling.

Glass Dumping Case

While nearly 100% of the glass bottles returned for redemption are recycled regionally into products – mostly new glass bottles – that has not been the case for much of the glass collected in curbside programs in Vermont. For example, Casella ships its glass all the way to North Carolina so that it can be further processed for recycling, and the Chittenden Solid Waste District paid \$400,000 in late 2020 to settle a case with the VT Attorney General having to do with the District's secret dumping of glass meant for recycling over a period of at least five years. In all, at least 18,000 TONS of glass – equal to about 33 million empty wine bottles – were illegally dumped instead of being recycled.

Why was the glass secretly dumped? A 2019 document from Casella in NY may explain why:

“Glass that is redeemed through the bottle bill system is much more likely to end up in a higher end use than glass produced at Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs). This is because it is kept separate from other materials, whereas glass produced by MRFs is contaminated with shredded paper, bottle caps, straws, corks, and other small items.”

<https://www.casella.com/blog/expanded-bottle-bill>

The public document from Casella was written in opposition to a proposal in NYS to expand the Bottle Bill there, but Casella supported adding glass. The company now has a different position in Vermont at least in part because glass is heavy, and the company collects a lot of money in tipping fees when the glass is dumped at one of its facilities.

Vermont Public Interest Research Group

141 Main Street, Suite 6 • Montpelier, VT 05602 • Tel: 802-223-5221 • Fax: 802-223-6855 • www.vpirg.org

But Casella is not alone in making public statements supporting more glass in the Bottle Bill system. In May of 2019, Michele Morris, outreach and communications director for CSWD, explained why glass should go to the Bottle bill instead of MRFs:

Morris suggested the bottle bill could be expanded to cover wine bottles and other types of glass jars.

“That’s a better stream for glass,” she said. “Let’s get it where it has the best likelihood of having its value retained and being made back into new glass.”

<https://vtdigger.org/2019/05/29/glass-dumping-violation-points-poor-glass-recycling-market/>

Wine Bottles Included in Other Bottle Bill Programs

Vermont would not be the first state to add wine to its Bottle Bill. Two other U.S. states (Maine and Iowa) and 17 other regions around the world already do so.

Bar Codes Instead of Stickers

The wine industry could choose to avoid the burden of placing a sticker on each bottle by including a code directly on the original label, just like the beer and soft drink industry does today. So-called “nips” or “shorties” (liquor bottles containing 50ml or less) are only included in Maine’s Bottle Bill, and yet manufacturers made the decision to add a code to the original label rather than going the sticker route. Therefore, if Vermont added wine to its deposit program in addition to Maine and Iowa, this would increase the likelihood that the industry would see value in adding a code to the original label.