

Beverage Container Redemption During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Issue

This report describes changes to beverage container redemption in Connecticut due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

Governor Lamont's [Executive Order 7H](#) (§ 1) designated recycling collection, which includes beverage container redemption at retail locations and redemption centers, as an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic thus allowing it to continue.

From March 17, 2020, to May 20, 2020, the Department of Energy and Environment Protection (DEEP) suspended its enforcement of the law's requirement that retailers take back empty beverage containers for redemption to allow retailers to focus staff efforts on such things as product restocking and cleaning.

Beginning May 20, 2020, retailers had to resume redemption activities, but were allowed, for safety reasons, to impose limits on redemption. Among other things, they could limit the number of people in a redemption area at one time, the number of containers redeemed by a person at once, or the daily operating hours for redemption or collection areas.

Beginning June 3, 2020, DEEP required retailers to resume full redemption activities.

Background – Beverage Container Redemption Law

Connecticut's beverage container redemption law ("bottle bill") establishes a system for recycling the following beverage containers: beer, soft drinks, and waters. The system is driven by the

payment of a five-cent deposit at the time of purchase which is then returned to the consumer when he or she brings the empty container to be recycled at either a retail location or a redemption center ([CGS § 22a-243 et seq.](#)).

Additional information about the bottle bill is available on DEEP's [website](#) and in several OLR reports, including [2019-R-0223](#) (*Issue Brief: Connecticut's Bottle Bill*).

Suspended Enforcement During COVID-19

DEEP's temporary suspension of its bottle bill enforcement activity applied to retailers and to their redemption activities, not to independent redemption centers. It allowed retailers to refuse to take back empty beverage containers without being issued a notice of violation. (Retailers could continue to take back beverage containers if they chose to do so, but DEEP recommended that employees taking back containers at retailers or redemption centers wear personal protective equipment, such as nitrile gloves.)

In its [press release](#) announcing the action, DEEP indicated that the suspension was intended to allow retailers to focus on restocking shelves and cleaning activities. It also indicated that retailers may have had fewer employees available during store hours to manage redemption and collection areas.

Retailer Take Back Requirements

By law, a retailer is generally required to take back containers of the kind, size, and brand that it sells ([CGS § 22a-245](#)).

The suspension initially ran from March 17 until March 31; DEEP then extended it to April 30, and again to May 20.

Retailer Redemption Limitations

DEEP [required](#) retailers to resume redemption activity on May 20, but allowed them to do so on a limited basis until June 3, when full redemption operations had to resume. Retailers failing to properly resume redemption operations are subject to DEEP enforcement action.

Based on their specific circumstances, retailers individually determined their redemption limitations, which they had to post. Restrictions included such things as:

1. limiting how many people may be in a redemption or collection area at one time or how long someone may be in the area,
2. limiting the number of containers someone may redeem at once or how many containers a retailer may redeem in a day,
3. limiting the daily operating hours for redemption activity, and
4. social distancing and mask-wearing requirements.

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