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# FAST FACTS

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## Manitoba Needs a Strategy for Beverage Containers

**T**he unsightly litter created by discarded beverage containers is evident to everyone who walks the streets and pathways of cities, or drives the highways and byways of Manitoba. Almost everywhere you turn you can see the clutter of cardboard juice boxes, aluminum cans that are used for soft drinks, juices and energy drinks, glass and plastic liquor bottles, and plastic water bottles.

The problem doesn't stop with the aesthetic degradation; the mess has to be cleaned up. In the absence of provincial government policies to address the problem, the costs of the clean up, removal and storage of containers (usually in land-fill sites) falls on the taxpayers of municipalities.

We are familiar with the deposit-based systems in the provinces for the collection and recycling of beer containers. Purchasers of beer pay a refundable deposit on each beer container and whoever turns it in to a collection depot (usually beer vendors) gets the deposit back.

All provinces, except Manitoba, apply refundable container deposits to one or more other beverages. The most comprehensive programs are in Alberta and Saskatchewan which have deposits on all containers except those for dairy products, and coverage in Alberta will be extended to dairy products June 1, 2009.

The most useful comparison for evaluating Manitoba's beverage container programs is with Saskatchewan. In Saskatchewan, an environmental handling charge (EHC) is applied to all non-refillable containers. The revenues generated from the EHCs, which range from \$.03 to \$.07 cents per container, fund the costs of the program infrastructure. As well, fully refundable deposits are charged on all containers: charges vary according to the size and composition of the containers.

Under the Manitoba Product Stewardship Plan (MPSP), which was established in 1995, by way of contrast, "beverage producers were given the option of setting up a deposit-return system or paying a 2 cent per container levy." And guess what? All of them except beer producers opted to collect a 2 cent levy from purchasers for the funding of 80% of the costs of multi-material municipal curbside recycling programs. End of story!

Recovery /recyclable rates for non-refillable containers are an indicator of the relative effectiveness of different programs. As is shown in the table, the Saskatchewan program is much superior to the Manitoba program.



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MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1  
T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201  
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca  
www.policyalternatives.ca

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## *FAST FACTS continued ...*

<b>Recovery Rates Non-refillable containers, 2004</b>		
<b>Materials</b>	<b>Saskatchewan</b>	<b>Manitoba</b>
Aluminum	95%	54%
Glass	89%	44%
Bi-Metal	95%	39%
Plastic	86%	58%
Other	56%	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>n/a</b>

**Source:** *Who Pays What: An Analysis of Beverage Container Recovery and Costs in Canada, 2004-2005. CM Consulting, 2006*

Indeed, Saskatchewan was at the top of the league tables for virtually every category of container, while Manitoba was at or near the bottom.

In recent years, some Manitoba organizations have called on the Manitoba government to establish a deposit-based collection and recycling system for beverage containers.

For example, in 2006, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities approved by a large margin a resolution directing the AMM to “lobby the Province of Manitoba to establish a 10-cent deposit on all drink containers in this province and create the infrastructure required to ensure the processing of containers on which deposits are paid and the payment of deposits to individuals who bring in the containers.”

Manitoba Conservation notified AMM that such a program would not be considered because of the significant impact it would have on the current recycling support programs managed by MPSC. Apparently, it never occurred to Manitoba Conservation that the resolution from AMM was inspired by the evidence showing that the beverage container program of MPSC is ineffective and needs to be replaced by a deposit-based program.

A similar resolution was debated at NDP Convention in 2008. The resolution, which originated with Brandon East, noted that there is in Manitoba an urgent need to promote and enhance consumer

recycling of beverage containers and proposed “that the provincial government established a deposit-based system for the collection and recycling of beverage containers based upon the Saskatchewan model.”

Saskatchewan was identified as a model for Manitoba to follow because it a number of features that merit emulation.

First, the program is managed by the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres (SARC), a non-profit organization “that provides residential, developmental and employment supports/services to individuals with disabilities.” SARCAN (the recycling branch of SARC) is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. At present, it employs 575 people in the recycling program in a variety of jobs. A similar program in Manitoba could be used to expand employment and training opportunities for individuals whose opportunities are limited by their disabilities.

Second, there has been considerable debate about the negative impact of the expansion of bottled water on public water utilities. Raising the price of beverages through the imposition of a larger levy and a deposit should curtail the growth in sales of bottled water (and also other products such as energy drinks that are now being flagged as potentially dangerous to the health of children and adolescents).

Finally, in an age when we are reoccupied with the potential impact of global warming, surely we have an obligation to seek to curtail the use of oil to produce plastic bottles. The deposit structure provides leverage to encourage the use of more benign packaging for many beverages.

Surely it is evident that, when all things are considered, adoption of a system similar to what they have in Saskatchewan for the recovery and recycling of beverage containers would produce significant economic and social benefits for the province.

*Errol Black is a CCPA-Manitoba board member and a Brandon City Councillor*



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