

#3

Not an Ounce of Responsibility: Coke, Pepsi and Plastic Bottle Waste

The problem

Plastic beverage container waste is growing rapidly in the United States. Recycling rates for plastic bottles have plummeted in recent years and the amount wasted – sent to landfills or incinerators – has more than doubled in the last decade. The great majority of what is recycled comes from the 10 states with deposit laws – laws vigorously opposed by the beverage industry.

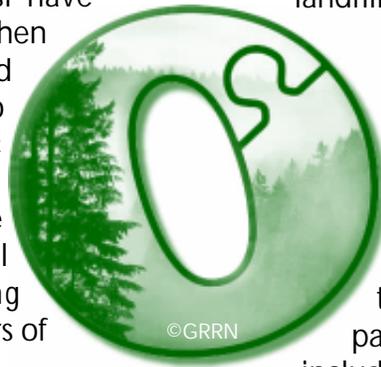
Industry leaders Coke and Pepsi have reneged on public promises to strengthen markets by using recycled plastic and have opposed effective measures to improve plastics collection. Public policy has generally failed to hold corporations responsible for their waste and, as a result, the costs of disposal and the threats to local recycling programs fall squarely on the shoulders of local government.

Both [Coca Cola](#) and [Pepsi](#), over 10 years ago, pledged to the American public that they would increase the recycled content of their plastic soft drink bottles to 25%. Today, as a result of public pressure, Coke has set a goal of 10% while Pepsi is using 0% in Pepsi brand products. Recently, through acquisition of competing brands, Pepsi quietly attempted to reverse the use of recycled plastic content in Gatorade bottles, but was forced to reinstate recycled plastic due to public pressure.

Who should pay?

Coca Cola and Pepsi aggressively market their products to local governments and school districts, through exclusive contracts giving the company virtually unlimited access to sometimes captive markets, usually in exchange for cash payments over the course of the contract and other premiums.

The market leaders are passing the burden and costs of improved collection on to municipal curbside recycling programs, rather than taking responsibility to create the incentives and infrastructure needed to recover used containers. Let's be perfectly clear: the public pays for Coke's and Pepsi's waste, while they profit. The public pays because we subsidize the cost of recycling and landfilling billions of bottles.



The solution: Producer responsibility

[Producer responsibility](#) is the simple – though perhaps radical – principle that brand owners and manufacturers must take full responsibility for their products and packaging throughout the product life-cycle, including in particular product take-back and end of life management. Applied widely in Europe, extended producer responsibility (“EPR”) creates incentives for brand owners to minimize waste and encourages them to support mechanisms for effective recycling.

Deposit systems, higher recycled content standards, and use of refillable bottles are examples of EPR principles applied to beverage containers. Coca Cola and Pepsi resist even modest proposals for increased responsibility for container waste, blocking new proposals and attempting to weaken successful existing programs.

Local governments can play a key role in promoting producer responsibility for beverage container waste.



Take Action

The GrassRoots Recycling Network (GRRN) - together with local government bodies, socially responsible investment firms, 200 endorsing organizations, and tens of thousands of consumers, activists and students — wants Coca-Cola and Pepsi to take responsibility for their plastic beverage container waste. Local governments can influence public policy and market practices in several important ways, including:

- **Procurement and contracts:** Exclusive beverage contracts for public venues and schools should establish container recycling rates and minimum recycled content standards.
- **Container deposit laws:** Effective container deposit laws boost recycling rates for all beverage containers to 80% percent or more and can help reduce local government waste disposal costs (the City of Columbia MO has had a successful municipal deposit program since 1982).

Model Beverage Container Resolution

WHEREAS

- The placement of materials in waste disposal facilities, such as landfills and incinerators, causes damage to human health, wastes natural resources, and wrongly transfers liabilities to future generations; and
- The commitment of [City/County] to the recovery of plastics through its recycling program has extended over ___ years; and
- While the market value of recycled PET (polyethylene tetrathalate - the soda bottle) has varied widely over these years, never before have we found ourselves in today's crisis situation, where we must pay to market our PET plastics; and
- It is widely acknowledged that the use of recycled PET in the production of beverage containers would have an enormous positive impact on the value of recycled PET; and
- FDA-approved technology exists today to incorporate recycled PET into new beverage containers, and in fact is being done by Coca-Cola in several nations throughout the world; and

- The Coca-Cola Company has made the marketing decision to increase its use of PET plastic, and move away from the use of easily recyclable glass and aluminum, for their containers; and
- We were thankful when Coca-Cola and Pepsi voluntarily committed to using recycled PET in their containers in 1990, at a time when many states were considering bottle bill initiatives to bring about increased recycling;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT

- [City/County] goes on record in support of the consumer action calling on Coca-Cola and Pepsi to increase the collection of used beverage containers, and to use recycled PET in their bottles, thereby closing the recycling loop, and returning a measure of rationality and profitability to the operations of our nation's public and private recycling programs; and
- [City/County] directs Purchasing and all other City Departments to restrict future contracts with beverage companies or vendors that sell plastic beverage bottles to those who provide beverages in plastic bottles with at least 25% recycled content by the end of the year ____ .

Advocating Producer Take-Back: *GrassRoots Recycling Network*

Producer take back is a key element of [GRRN's Zero Waste agenda](#). Effective, environmentally sound collection of products at the end of their useful life is the first step in promoting clean design, increasing recycled content, limiting virgin resource extraction, and properly allocating responsibility. GRRN believes that [producer responsibility](#) and Zero Waste will happen because local communities and their citizens can make it happen.

For more information, visit www.grrn.org/localgov/