Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Leading Iowans in caring for our natural resources

Recycling Policy Study Committee

Iowa's "Bottle Bill"

Alex Moon, Land Quality Bureau Chief

Enacted in 1979 to fight litter, the “Bottle Bill” [Iowa Code 455C], also promotes recycling and reduces waste going to landfills

The “Bottle Bill” achieves several state legislative policies regarding waste reduction

455B.301A Declaration of policy.

2. In the implementation of the solid waste management policy, the state shall:

…….*b.* Utilize the capabilities of private enterprise as well as the services of public agencies to accomplish the desired objectives of an effective solid waste management program.

455D.2 Findings.

The general assembly finds that:

…….5. The reduction of solid waste at the source and the recycling of reusable waste materials will reduce the flow of waste to sanitary landfills and increase the supply of reusable materials for the use of the public.

455D.4 Waste volume reduction policies.

1. It is the policy of this state to encourage the development of waste volume reduction programs and education at the local government level through incentives, technical assistance, grants, and other practical measures.

…….5. The people of this state recognize that a variety of benefits result from a comprehensive waste reduction policy including the following environmental, economic, governmental, and public benefits:

…….*d.* Public confidence in environmental policies of the government is important for the effectiveness of these policies. Waste reduction poses no adverse environmental and public health effects and does not, therefore, lead to increased public concern. Waste reduction also increases the public confidence that the government and industry are doing all that is possible to protect human health and the environment.

455D.5 Statewide waste reduction and recycling network — established.

2. The elements of the network shall include but are not limited to all of the following:

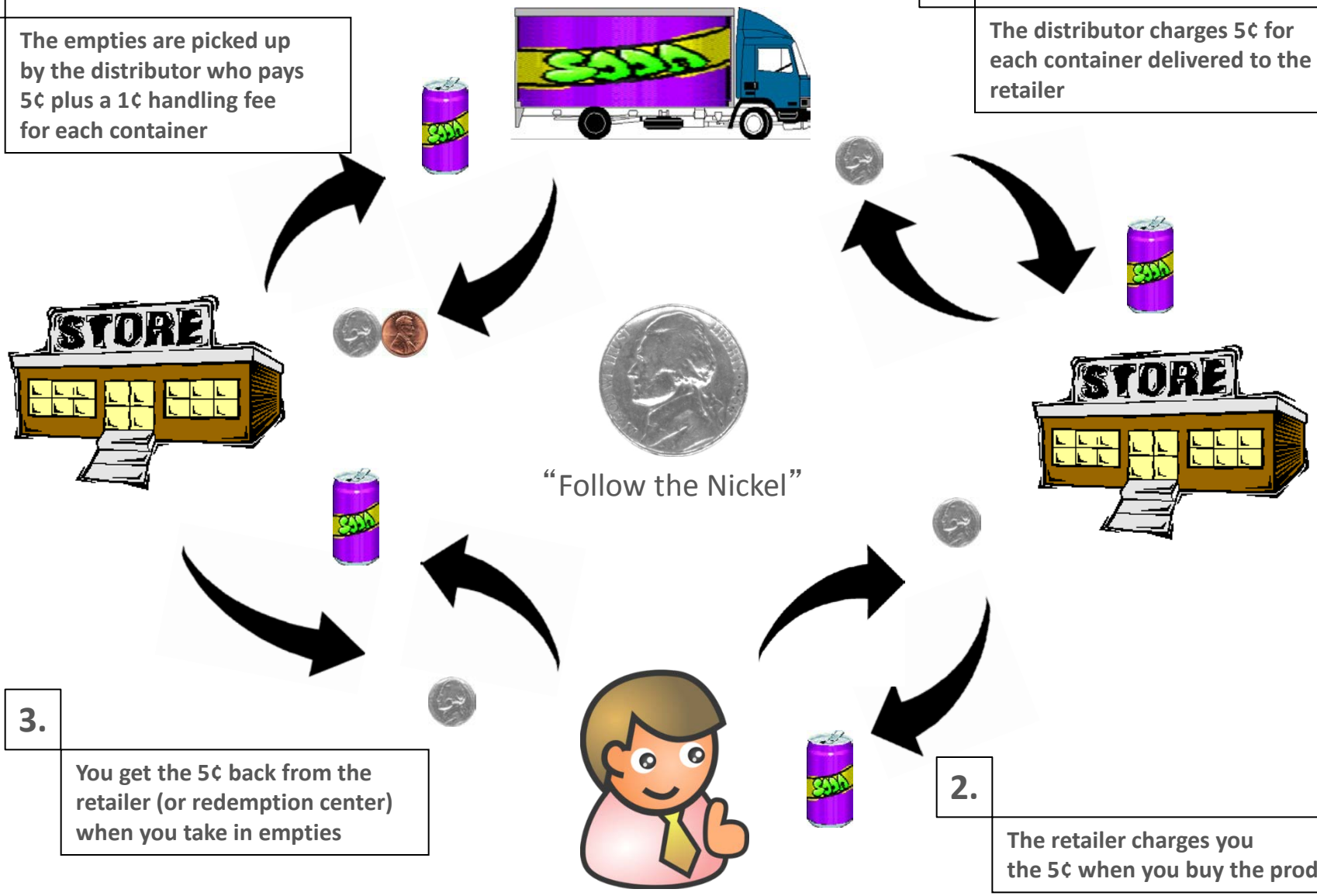
…….*b.* Promotion of efforts to recover recyclable materials from the waste stream.

1. The distributor charges 5¢ for each container delivered to the retailer

2. The retailer charges you the 5¢ when you buy the product

3. You get the 5¢ back from the retailer (or redemption center) when you take in empties

4. The empties are picked up by the distributor who pays 5¢ plus a 1¢ handling fee for each container



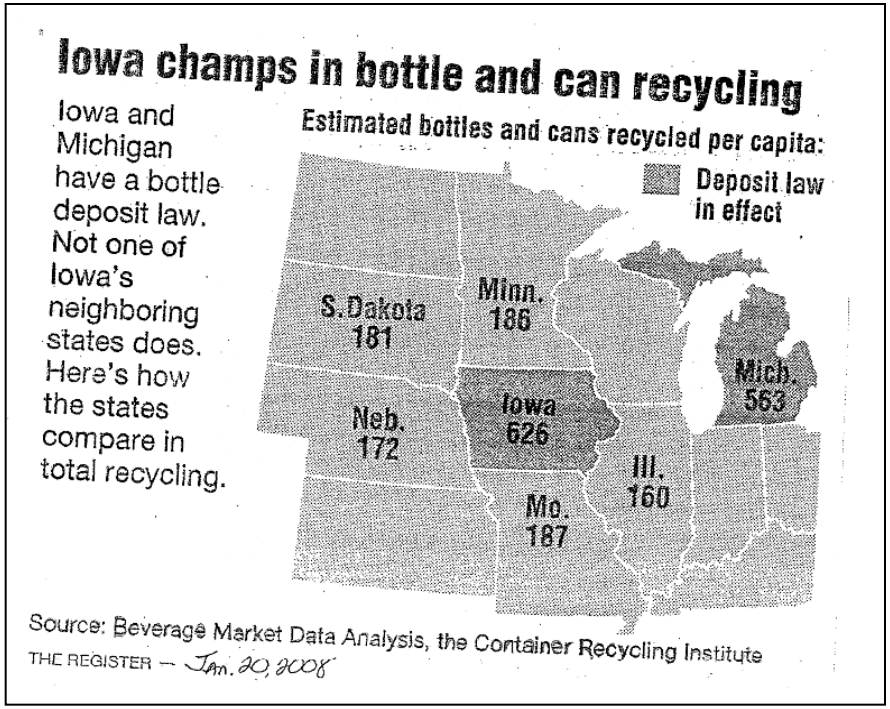
Redemption Centers

- The law also allows for Redemption Centers
- Instead of redeeming empties at Retailers, people can take their empties to a Redemption Center to get the refunds
- Distributors work with Redemption Centers just as they do the Retailers; picking up empties, reimbursing refunds, and paying the 1¢ handling fees
- Redemption Centers can be either “approved” or “unapproved”

- To encourage recycling, redeemed beverage containers are prohibited by law from being disposed of in landfills

- Iowans recycle an average of 563 containers per person each year, compared to 191 containers per person each year in non-deposit states
- Iowa has an estimated 86% recovery rate
- 14% of over 2 billion containers (280 million empties) are not returned for the refunds
- The law does not address “unclaimed deposits”

Having the nickel deposit appears to make a difference in bottle and can recycling



The law also provides the means for people to collect the refunds on discarded cans and bottles – creating a fundraising tool

Other Benefits

Energy savings attributable to the “Bottle Bill” could heat 42,845 average Iowa households

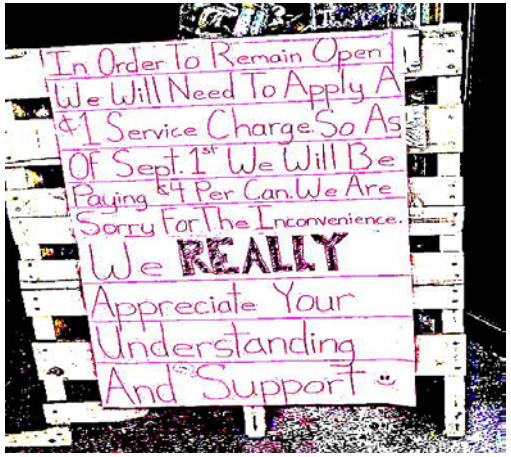
The current deposit law prevents litter and recycles 82,352 tons or 190,850 cubic yards of material per year

Equivalent to a line of 784 large railroad box cars stretching more than 68,000 feet long

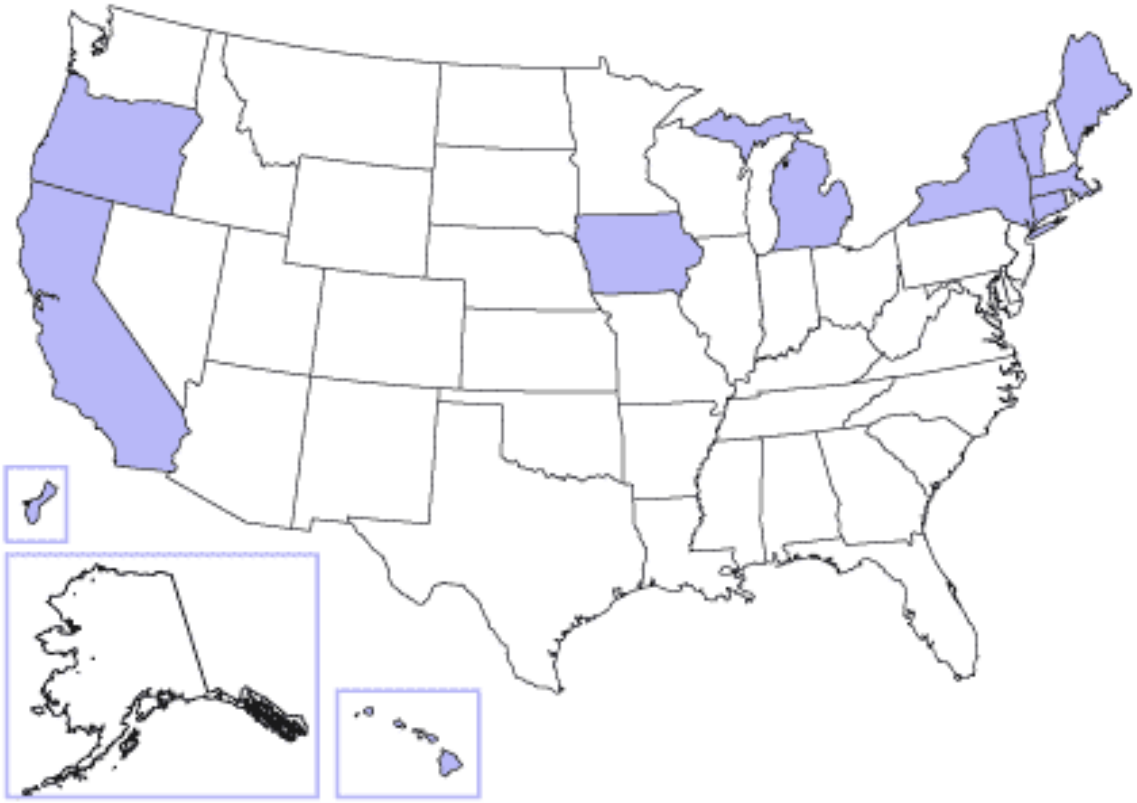
"Bottle Bill" Challenges Brought to Our Attention

- The 1¢ handling fee has remained unchanged since 1979

- When costs rise, Redemption Centers:
  - Reduce hours of operation
  - Request customers to sort empties and/or put empties in bags or in flats or boxes
  - Reimburse less than the full refunds
- Over time, more than two thirds of the Redemption Centers have closed
  - There once were over 300 Redemption Centers, but the number is now fewer than 100
- Iowa state government has no enforcement powers in the "Bottle Bill"
  - Violations are simple misdemeanors, issued by local law enforcement



Other “Bottle Bill” States



California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Vermont

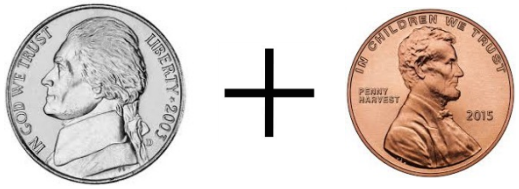
Beverages Covered Under the Law

Iowa

Other States

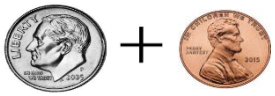
Deposit and Handling Fee

Iowa



Other States

California



Hawaii

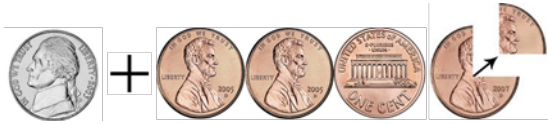
Connecticut

Maine & Vermont

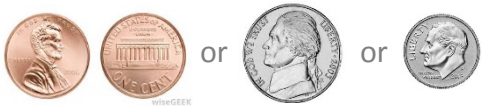
Michigan

Massachusetts

New York



Oregon



Scrap Metal Value

Iowa

Other States

California & Hawaii

All other states

Unredeemed Deposits

Iowa

Other States

California
Connecticut
Hawaii
Massachusetts
Maine
Michigan
New York

Split amongst state and distributors

Oregon
Vermont
Maine
Michigan
New York

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