

Environment and Transportation Department,
Block 2, Floor 6,
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To Each Member of the
Environment Strategic Policy Committee

Deposit Refund Schemes & Recycling of Bulky Plastics

Deposit Refund Scheme

This issue of Deposit Refund Scheme was originally examined by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2014 with the Review of the Producer Responsibility Initiative Model in Ireland. The aim of the review was to assess the nature and level of the challenges which are currently facing the existing Producer Responsibility Agreements, as well as the forthcoming challenges that are expected to arise in the management of various waste streams. As part of this review, a wider examination of issues within the packaging sphere was undertaken and consideration was given to the introduction of a bring back scheme for waste.

The review report did not recommend the introduction of a Deposit and Refund scheme and concluded that to establish such a scheme was inappropriate, in view of the operation of the existing packaging scheme (operated by Repak), and policies concerning household waste collection, plus the high administrative costs of introducing such a system.

In September this year, Scotland announced that it will introduce a deposit return system for drinks containers. In addition to this Scotland announced the establishment of an expert panel to consider fiscal and other measures, for example a levy on single use cups.

Following a recent Private Members Bill tabled by Deputy Eamon Ryan, Denis Naughton, Minister for Communications Climate Action and the Environment has asked the Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and the Environment to look at the merits of a Deposit & Refund scheme at a national level. It is likely that any consideration of this would have to take account of national policy on packaging waste which is administered by a successful Producer Responsibility Scheme (Repak).

In its most recent statistical report on waste packaging the EPA estimated that 870,109 tonnes of packaging waste was generated in Ireland in 2013. Of the total generated, 766,847 tonnes (88%) was recovered (including preparation for reuse, recycling, energy recovery and other recovery) and 610,397 tonnes (70%) was recycled. These figures put Ireland well ahead of most of our EU partners and considerably exceeding our EU mandatory targets for treating this waste stream.

Collection & Recycling of Bulky Plastics

The majority of bulky plastics (drums, containers, toys etc) are currently collected through private skip hire or bulky collections at Civic Amenity Sites. Any recyclable plastics are extracted and sent to suitable reprocessing plants. It should be noted that many of the bulky plastics particularly toys such as swings slides etc contain other materials and/or multiple polymers which result in these products not being recyclable. In these instances the products are generally shredded and sent for thermal recovery. It is significant that the landfill operators have reported a significant drop off in bulky plastics over the last few years which is positive in terms of moving the treatment process for these wastes further up the hierarchy. It would be beneficial for the members to visit a local plant to view the sorting and processing operations for these and indeed waste materials in general.

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