

Q & A's

Questions and Answers on Glass Recycling Issues

1 September 2008

Question 1: How does glass rate in terms of recycling compared to other materials like paper and aluminum?

Answer: Unlike most other recyclables, glass can be recycled over and over, almost into infinity, and still retain its tensile strength and aesthetic qualities. But the raw materials that are used to make glass (mostly sand, along with soda ash and limestone) are so abundant and cheap that when you take glass to be sold to bottle makers for making new glass, it doesn't have a very high market value.

Let's look at a comparison. If you take a load of aluminum cans to a scrap metal dealer, you might get paid as much as \$1,600/ton! And if you go to the Larimer County Recycling Center with a load of pure newspaper or pure cardboard, they'll pay you \$35 and \$28/ton, respectively.

To recycle glass, you'd first have to go to the trouble of getting it to a processor (the nearest is 60 miles from Fort Collins). There, you'd be paid \$20/ton for mixed colored glass, or \$55/ton for amber (brown) glass.

Question 2: Why the difference in price between brown glass and other mixed colors?

Answer: Brown glass, or amber glass as it's known in the industry, is especially useful for making new beer bottles. In Wheat Ridge, the nice folks at Rocky Mountain Bottle Company make new beer bottles for the Coors brewery in Golden.

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Question 3: Aren't there other ways to use recycled glass than to make new bottles or jars?

Answer: It would be great if we had a glass-tile company, or a manufacturer who could use recycled glass to make fancy modern countertops, here in Colorado, but even then, they would probably only be able to use a small percentage of the glass we generate. Some areas of the country are using glass to make road-base or back-fill material for trenches and other engineering applications. However, as of now, that industry has not been very successful in getting established in our area.

Question 4: Why don't we have an advanced deposit on beverage containers, including glass, here in Colorado - wouldn't that help us "capture" more of the glass to be recycled?

Answer: Eleven states already have "bottle bill" systems, where you pay a refundable nickel or dime per bottle at the point of purchase on beverage containers. A number of other states have also been studying this approach (the beverage companies are often big opponents to advance disposal/deposit requirements), because in those states that do have bottle bills, 85-90% of the containers get recycled. Non-bottle bill states, by comparison, struggle to recover 50% of their bottles and cans - at best!

Question 5: How much separated glass has the City of Fort Collins been collecting from the voluntary glass-only recycling bin at the Rivendell Recycling Center?

Answer: In 2007 we collected a total of 32 tons. So far, in 2008 we have collected 25 tons of clean glass as more people who want to be super-recyclers find out about this drop-off option.

Citizens will find the white-colored bin for separated glass inconspicuously placed on the right side of the drop-off site, as they enter the Rivendell Recycling Center (located at 1702 Riverside in Fort Collins. Hours of operation run from dawn to dusk, seven days/week).