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Environmentalists' report proposes deposits for cans and bottles

BY DAN WESTELL
Environment Reporter

TORONTO — Every time Ontario residents do their environmental duty by slipping a wine bottle or a pop can into the blue box, they shift a little money to the provincial liquor board and soft-drink companies, an environmentalists' report says.

The widely supported blue-box recycling system is the mechanism for this subsidy program, the Toronto Environmental Alliance says in a critique and proposed solution for the financially strapped recycling system.

The blue-box system mixes materials whose value, once they are recycled, is very different. Materials whose recycled value is as much as

they cost to pick up, such as certain types of paper, are lumped in with materials whose recycled value is much less, such as cans and bottles.

The solution, the alliance says, is to segregate the paper products that can pay their own way. "Soft-drink, juice, mineral water, wine and liquor containers . . . should carry deposits and be returnable to an industry-financed network of depots or returned to vendors," the report says.

That would shift the cost of paying recycling subsidies, estimated at \$85-million a year split between municipalities and the provincial government, from taxpayers to consumers and manufacturers of the products in question.

And a deposit-return system also would improve the proportion of

material recycled, the report says. This conclusion is based on the high return rate of bottles to Ontario's beer system, Brewers Retail.

Industry representatives disagreed with the alliance arguments. Setting up a parallel collection system, such as deposit returns, would cost much more per recycled tonne than the blue box, said Robert Flemington, president of OMMRI: Corporations in Support of Recycling.

Mr. Flemington also took issue with alliance statistics that only 20 per cent of pop containers are recycled, saying the figure is closer to 60 per cent. If the industry figure is correct, it undermines the alliance's contention that there are large recycling gains to be made by putting a deposit on pop containers.

Sandra Banks, who represents a group of six large industry associations operating as the Canadian Industry Packaging Stewardship Initiative, agreed that brewers run a very efficient program. But she said that is because they have a monopoly system with relatively few outlets and one product line.

Her group, which is trying to negotiate a broader-based recycling system with provincial governments that would involve companies paying more toward the blue box, thinks that it would be difficult for retailers to deal with returnables, she said.

As opposed to the alliance's user-pay philosophy, both industry groups favour sharing recycling costs among consumers, producers, and taxpayers.