

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, November 23, 2024 beamed in from the *Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

This week, the *Beacon* dug into Jefferson County's latest trash problem: glass. As has been widely reported, for the foreseeable future, glass will be headed to the landfill alongside our other garbage. The change doesn't have to mean a permanent end to glass recycling, though it could take a long time for an alternative to be possible. Processing our own glass is an exciting idea, but the reality is that it's difficult to do any kind of recycling on such a small scale.

Gallatin, Tennessee is one of a handful of cities that have purchased a glass crusher to turn bottles into sand and small glass chunks. With help from a state grant, the city bought the crusher in 2017 and planned to use the crushed glass in construction projects. But according to Gallatin Public Works Coordinator Dianna Witsman, despite thinking other organizations might use the crushed glass for aggregate and larger jobs, that hasn't been the case and glass has been piling up.

Closer to home, Thurston County also crushes its glass into sand, using Tumwater-based Concrete Recyclers. They have ended up with the same issue: Despite working with the county to provide the sand for road maintenance and construction projects, the company is creating far more sand than the county can use.

A different solution could come in the form of a bottle bill, according to Laura Tucker, the education and outreach specialist for Jefferson County Public Health and Public Works. Tucker pointed out that Washington is the only state on the West Coast that does not have a bottle bill. A "bottle bill" is a law that requires consumers to pay a small refundable deposit on beer, soft drink, and other beverage containers to ensure a high rate of recycling or reuse.

In Oregon, if you were to purchase a six-pack of beer, the law requires you to put down a deposit of 10 cents a bottle, so you'd pay an extra 60 cents for six bottles. When you've had your fun, you then bring the bottles back to the store or the recycling facility and get your 60 cents back. The returned bottles are then taken to Glass to Glass in Portland, where they are turned into new bottles. Thanks to its bottle bill, Oregon has a 90.5% return rate, meaning that nearly all bottles sold in Oregon go back to be recycled. The 10 cents for every bottle that isn't returned, which is only 9.5% of all bottles sold, funds the entire recycling program.

Over the past several years, there have been a few attempts to have a bottle bill signed into law in Washington, including one attempt brought forward by Port Townsend High Schoolers. In 2017, participants in the high school Students for Sustainability program traveled to Olympia to speak with lawmakers about passing a bottle bill. Unfortunately, despite bottle bills appearing in the capitol in a variety of forms, nothing has passed.

Zero Waste Washington (<https://zerowastewashington.org/>), a nonprofit dedicated to helping set environmental policy, is still working to enact bills that keep waste out of landfills. It recommended that you reach out to your state legislators if you would like another bottle bill brought forward.

A solution may be several years away, but it's still important to buy items made of glass instead of plastic. Jefferson County's Laura Tucker, a lifelong scientist and educator, understands the frustration people feel at having to throw away items they know should be recycled. But she emphasizes that it is still worthwhile to buy

items in glass bottles. In particular, Tucker noted that plastic does excrete carcinogens and hormone disruptors into your food.

She added that other recycling efforts in Jefferson County are still going well. We're the last county in Washington to separate all of our different types of recycling, finding markets that still accept other materials. Most notably, we recycle cardboard locally, traveling only a mile from the transfer station to the paper mill.

And there are other reasons to stay positive about glass in Jefferson County. Tucker pointed out that the Food Co-op accepts clean, label-free wide-mouth jars with lids that can be used for bulk food shoppers. And Finnriver Cidery in Chimacum also reuses their glass with the aid of an on-site bottle washer.

Remember, it's always better to find ways to reuse than recycle, and perhaps this most recent recycling hurdle can be the start of local reuse innovation and a chance to push through long overdue legislation.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.