

Governor signs AB 1311: Provides new flexibility for recycling centers

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Gov. Gavin Newsom recently signed AB 1311 by Assemblymember Jim Wood (D-Santa Rosa), a bill that will address the shortage of recycling facilities, especially in rural areas.

For decades, California's recycling program, in place since 1987, was one of the most successful in the country. Unfortunately drops in commodity prices and the system filling with mostly plastic that has no value, has led to the closing of more than 1,000 recycling centers in California since 2013, many in rural communities.

"Currently there are no certified redemption centers in Humboldt, Trinity, Sierra or Alpine county," said Wood. "Given the rural nature of these regions, it has become impossible and impractical for consumers to recover their California Refund Value (CRV) deposits. Something had to be done."

The California Beverage Container Recycling and Litter Reduction Act contains specific guidelines and CalRecycle has not made any changes to accommodate challenges faced by rural communities. Working

closely with the Humboldt Waste Management Authority (HWMA), Wood drafted AB 1311 to address some of the most significant problems for rural redemption centers, including the lack of flexibility.

“I listened to the HWMA’s challenges and comments from the community, and looked for ways to change the system,” said Wood. I felt like David fighting Goliath, even when I was only asking for modest changes, like modifying the hours of operation, but eventually we made some progress.”

AB 1311 authorizes CalRecycle to allow certified recycling centers to operate on an alternative schedule, less than the currently required 30 hours per week, if it best serves the needs of the community and the goals of the program. It requires CalRecycle to develop a process that would allow recycling centers to apply for authorization to operate by appointment. It exempts dealers delivering empty beverage containers to a recycling center or processor from the daily load limits and authorizes the use of reverse vending machines and bag drop recycling centers, setting a 3-day standard for customers to receive payment of CRV without requiring full-time staffing.

“This is one piece of a very large puzzle, but for rural California, I believe the changes we were able to accomplish in AB 1311 will address their unique challenges and allow people to redeem their CRV deposits,” said Wood.