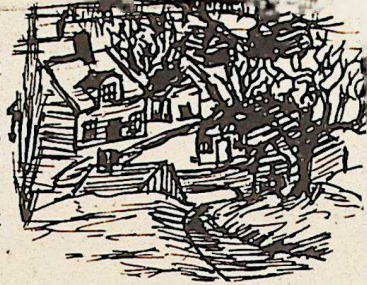


1 eye  
View  
by Andrea  
Leonard



Everybody talks about litter, but is anybody doing anything about it -- or is it like the weather?

The season for cleaning up roadside litter, and sending it to the dump where it should have gone in the first place, is now upon us.

There's little point in spending summer weekends patrolling the bushes; as fast as you collect bottles, cans, plastic wrappers and food containers, more appear.

We don't have to look at it all winter, though. Once Labor Day is behind us, the job will stay done -- longer.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has conducted a survey and come up with facts upon which they hope to base legislative control to help solve the problem.

They tell us, in detail with facts and figures, what we already know in general. Discarded beverage containers form 19% of roadside litter by item, and between 54% and 70% by volume. That's lots of bottles and cans.

Americans consume more bottled soft drinks and malt beverages than any other people in the world and the habit is growing. Between 1959 and 1972 annual consumption of beer and soft drinks in the United States increased 33% per person.

During this period, annual production of beer and soft drink containers skyrocketed 221% from 15.4 billion units to 55.7 billion units. This increase is partly attributable to no deposit-no return containers. By 1980, container consumption is expected to reach 80 billion units a year.

Three methods for controlling beverage container litter emerged from the EPA study: a litter tax, a ban on non-refillable containers, and a mandatory deposit on beverage containers. The EPA believes the one most likely to reverse the trend toward throwaways, while causing the least economic and industrial disruption, is a mandatory deposit law.

This would require retailers to pay consumers from 2¢ to 10¢ for every empty container of beer and carbonated soft drink. Returnables could be brought to distributors for refund; distributors could continue to use glass and aluminium containers and recycle empties for about a cent apiece, but new containers would cost four or five cents each. This would create a strong economic incentive to use returnables.

In Oregon and Vermont mandatory deposit laws are now in effect. Experience in those states indicates the deposit law has made a significant impact on reducing litter, on energy consumption to produce containers, and on the economy of bottle and can producing industries.

In Oregon, there's been a 75% to 85% decrease in beverage container litter or five to six million tons of cans and bottles.

In addition, energy to produce containers is saved. If a 90% refillable bottle market is achieved and each bottle makes ten trips (in practice 25 to 30 trips isn't unusual), there's a savings in energy of approximately 194 trillion BTUs per day -- or a savings of

92,000 barrels of oil per day.

Economic effects of mandatory deposit legislation are somewhat difficult to predict, but the EPA reports sales in Oregon show the deposit law hasn't disturbed previously existing growth patterns in beer sales.

Vermont data suggest soft drink sales declined 8%.

It's believed, however, if a mandatory deposit law were implemented nationally, no sales decline attributable to that law would result. Furthermore, consumers' prices for beer and soft drinks might even decline because the more expensive non-refillable containers wouldn't be widely available.

The major drawback to the proposed legislation is the potential for some temporary industrial disruption, for it's possible a number of employees would be forced onto the labor market.

Although more jobs would be created than lost by the change, those jobs would generally pay lower wages, producing a net loss in labor income.

In addition, container-handling equipment and beverage-can lines would become obsolete, resulting in a temporary decline in tax revenues due to corporate write-offs for antiquated equipment.

Employee dislocations and economic disruption could be substantially reduced, however, by a gradual phasing-in of the system over a period of five or perhaps ten years.

The Environmental Protection Agency favors this gradual adoption on a national scale of a mandatory deposit system to eliminate differences in beverage container legislation from state to state, and to assure a uniform and equitable program for manufacturer, bottler, and consumer.

This is all well and good. In another ten years, perhaps, -- at the rate the EPA, the legislatures, and lobbyists, and obstructionists, operate -- maybe we'll have a law that will begin to be effective ten years after that.

By then -- if we are now producing close to 55.7 billion such containers a year, and expect this to increase by 1980 (only five years) to 80 billion units per year -- we all should be about hip-deep in rusting cans and broken glass.

Isn't there something we can do NOW?

Every day the roads are more littered, landfills are more overburdened, more tires are ruined adding further burden for disposal areas, more people are cut -- some suffering severely, some scarred for life -- on bro-

glass.

The average American city's most urgent problem, according to more than 1,000 mayors and city councilmen responding to a recent survey conducted by the National League of Cities, is how to dispose of solid waste and refuse.

Doctors express deep concern about the serious wounds from broken glass they treat daily in hospital emergency rooms.

Both Connecticut and Wisconsin have passed legislation creating state-wide solid waste recycling systems.

In Wisconsin \$15 million in bonding authority has been provided a public corporation to build a resource recovery plant for a three-county area. Additional bonding for an extended area will be granted later.

In both states, private industry operates transfer stations and recycling plants and these are expected to be self-supporting through user charges and profits from recovered materials.

If Vermont and Oregon can cut litter by more than 75% and Wisconsin and Connecticut can afford resource recovery plants and transfer stations and recycling plants, and see them as profit-making, isn't there something Massachusetts can -- and should -- do?

If they can, why can't we? If we can, why don't we?

What in the world are we waiting for?