

Beverage Containers.....Waste No More!

I'll call the elephant in the room "Texas Employment Solutions". The lesson we learned from the three blind men trying to describe the whole elephant from their "feel" of things, was that although their descriptions were accurate, they were incomplete. Similarly, with Texas' "elephant", there is more than one solution; and here's one to give immediate consideration too.

Texas sells 17 billion beverage containers annually. At best we recycle approximately 25% (approx. 4 billion) of those resources via voluntary programs. The remaining 13 billion float or sink into our waterways and beaches, line our roadways, recreational areas, overflow trash cans and end up in our landfills. The 2009 Texas Visible Litter Study conducted by TXDOT, found 29% of the litter counted was alcoholic and non-alcoholic containers. The *Don't Mess with Texas* program, cost taxpayers \$44 million. The General Land Office oversees the *Texas Adopt-A-Beach* program and every year, twice a year, beverage containers make the top ten list of items collected.

The important news is that today beverage containers are desperately needed by the aluminum, glass, and plastic industries to meet self-imposed recycle content goals. Texas needs only to establish a convenient recovery system that will incentivize the consumer to return the containers (at least 75% of the 13 billion) for recycling. The supply - demand loop will be closed. Beverage container litter be gone, and new jobs in collecting, hauling, processing, and manufacturing the 9.6 billion containers enter the Texas economy.

The solution itself is a "recycled" one. Refundable deposits placed on beverage containers were established long ago when glass containers were refilled. Then it was a storage and backhaul headache. Deposits worked until aluminum, light and tossable, came on the scene. We've learned from those times. Texas will have the opportunity to re-establish refunds on containers for recycling in the 2013 legislature. This time 1000's of jobs will be created through free standing redemption centers. Young Sally and Sam, Mom and Pa, retirees, non-profits, and industry all will be able to partake in the job creation. The increase in collections will result in employment opportunities in hauling and processing the high quality and high volume materials.

Each beverage container is no longer fit for the trash. Each container is a valued, recoverable resource that, incentivized with just a nickel, will generate a new redemption industry and its multiple employment opportunities. New to Texas and good for Texans. It's one description of the Texas elephant named "Employment Solution." Texans need to educate their legislators to represent their voice and choice in the 2013 legislative session. The constituents need to be very loud.

Patsy Gillham is an environmental advocate and longtime supporter of refundable deposit.