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The Re-turn Scheme

A closer look at the potential value of the Deposit Return Scheme in Irish Hospitals



Introduction

The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for plastic drinks bottles and aluminium cans, Re-turn.ie, has been in place since 1 February 2024.

Based on most recent data, an average of 30 million containers are returned every week - that's 50 containers returned every second.



Hospitals – Re-turn Potential

Based on nationally reported waste statistics from the healthcare sector, the following table gives an estimate of the amount and value of cans and bottles potentially available.

	All acute hospitals		All community hospitals	
	Number of cans/bottles per year*		Number of cans/ bottles per year*	
PET Bottles (in general waste)	3,433,000		300,000	
PET Bottles (in recycling)	1,367,000		1,967,000	
AL Cans (in general waste)	400,000		17,000	
AL Cans (in recycling)	1,650,000		350,000	
Total	6,850,000		2,634,000	
Potential Re-turn value per year	All acute hospitals:	€ 1,028,000	All community hospitals:	€395,000
	ALL HOSPITALS: €1,423,000 POTENTIAL RE-TURN VALUE PER YEAR			

* Assuming that an AL can is 20 grams and average plastic bottle is 30 grams.

Options for Irish healthcare facilities for collecting containers

Installing a reverse vending machine

Suitable for larger acute hospitals. Requires investment. See St. James's hospital example on the next page.

Linking in with a local charity

A healthcare site can partner with a local charity and donate the deposits to them. They will come and collect the containers and take the deposits. Re-turn can link a healthcare site up with a local initiative. Re-turn will provide hospitals with free orange wheelie bins, with a commitment from the hospital green team that collected containers will be deposited at a retailer (e.g. by a charity partner). These bins have a rosette lid for collecting cans and bottles. Some healthcare locations opt to use their own style of bins.



Examples in Irish healthcare facilities



OSPIDÉAL SAN SÉAMAS
ST JAMES'S HOSPITAL



St James's Hospital has installed a reverse vending machine (similar to the ones you see in shops) with 2 options available – donate the deposit return to the St James's Foundation charity or reclaim the deposit in retail outlets on the hospital campus. A few other hospitals are also in the process of installing reverse vending machines.

WeCan



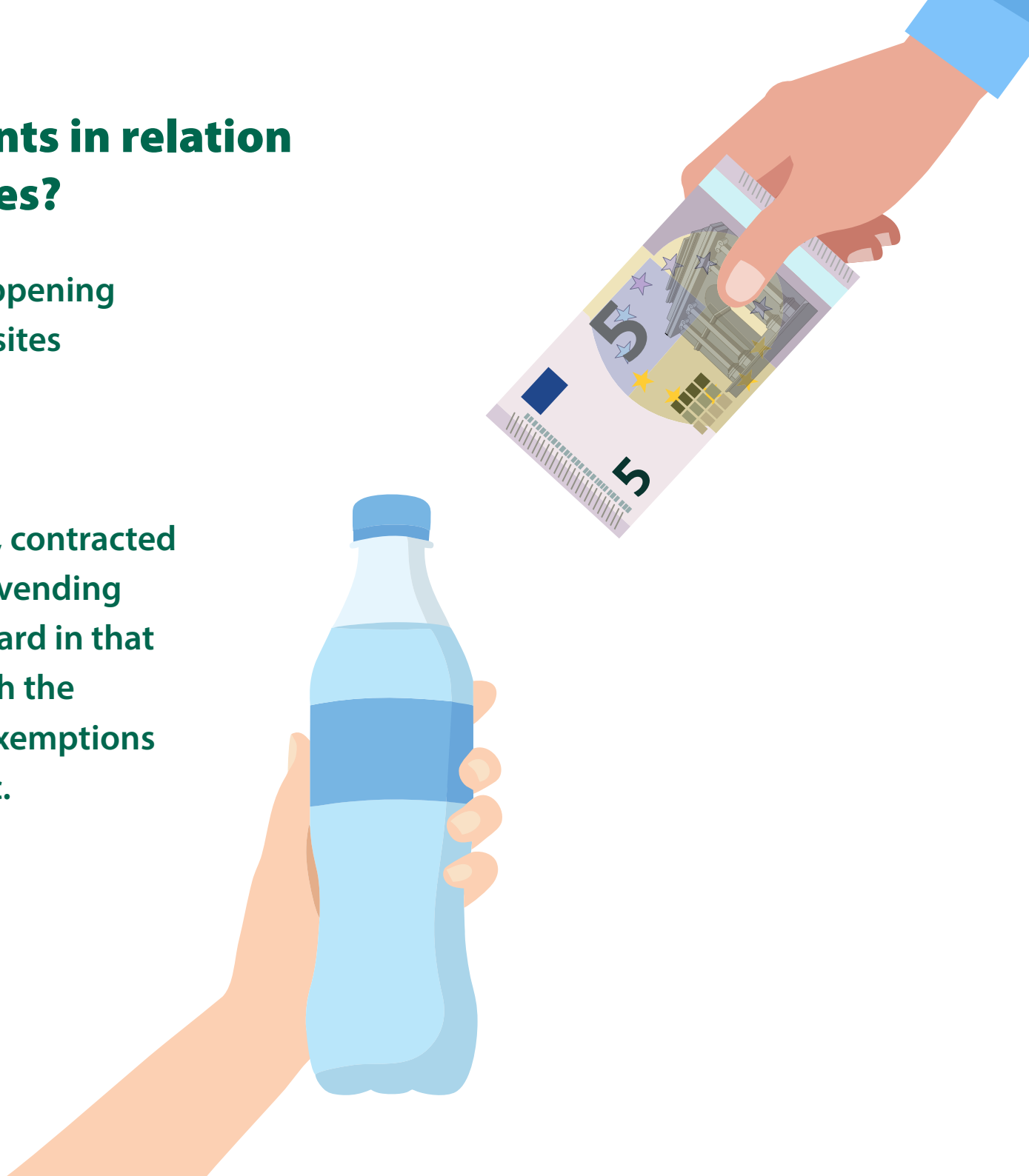
St Luke's, Kilkenny has engaged with wecan.ie, a local intellectual disability charity that collects the bottles and cans as part of its efforts to provide meaningful employment that has a positive impact on the environment.

What are the requirements in relation to sale of cans and bottles?

This depends firstly on what is happening on site as there are guidelines for sites where cans and bottles are sold.

External service providers:

The situation for contract caterers, contracted shops, on-site contracted cafés, & vending machine operators is straightforward in that the onus is on them to comply with the regulations, and register for any exemptions and put up exemption posters, etc.



Exemptions

Selling in-house: e.g. canteen run by own staff. These are considered a 'retailer' and 'hospitality' and then need to register online and request the take back exemption for hospitality.

Then a poster gets issued which is displayed in the canteen and this has a QR code to a map showing the nearest place to return bottles & cans.

In cases where the healthcare facility supplies such drinks containers to patients and residents, they will be classed as an end consumer (not a retailer) and will therefore need to collect and return at existing collection points to reclaim the deposit.



More information

For more information see www.re-turn.ie, contact your HSE Regional Sustainability Officer or contact Re-turn directly at communities@re-turn.ie

Engaging with the scheme helps to meet national recycling targets, implement the HSE climate action plan, and move towards a circular economy.



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