

RCW 70A.208.240 Study of deposit return system. (1) The department shall contract with an independent consultant to conduct two studies on the potential statewide impacts of a recycling refunds program, also known as a beverage container deposit return system, in Washington state. The studies must prioritize equity, accessibility, and community perspectives.

(2) The consultant, in coordination with the department, shall lead a community engagement process in at least three geographically diverse areas of the state with a high concentration of socially vulnerable or overburdened populations, as identified by the department consistent with RCW 70A.02.010. The results of this engagement process must be submitted to the legislature by January 1, 2027. The engagement process must:

(a) Solicit input on access to recycling and redemption services, local infrastructure needs, and community priorities related to convenience and equity;

(b) Assess consumer sentiment, awareness, and perceptions of a recycling refunds program, including perceived benefits, barriers to participation, and potential economic impacts, particularly for low-income households;

(c) Include:

(i) Community input sessions in overburdened communities;

(ii) Outreach to local governments, tribal governments, environmental justice and equity organizations, producers, recycling system operators, and other relevant stakeholders; and

(iii) Engagement with individuals and organizations concerned about the economic impacts of a recycling refunds program, particularly on low-income consumers; and

(d) Develop recommendations to ensure that a recycling refunds program is equitably accessible, convenient, and responsive to community needs across all regions of the state.

(3) In the same three regions required to be identified under subsection (2) of this section, the consultant shall evaluate and model what convenient access to redemption services would look like, with respect to the types of express and full-service redemption sites. The results of this engagement process must be submitted to the legislature by January 1, 2026. This analysis must at a minimum consider:

(a) The availability of suitable infrastructure for redemption services that include reusable packaging;

(b) Accessibility via public transportation;

(c) Colocation opportunities with existing waste or recycling facilities; and

(d) Strategies to reduce transportation burdens on residents in rural, remote, and underserved communities.

(4) The department shall submit the consultant's findings and recommendations to the appropriate committees of the house of representatives and the senate by January 1, 2026, for the study completed in subsection (3) of this section and January 1, 2027, for the study completed in subsection (2) of this section.

(5) Registered producer responsibility organizations under RCW 70A.208.030 are responsible for payment of the department's cost to complete these studies as part of the one-time payment due to the department on September 1, 2026, under RCW 70A.208.030(4). [2025 c 316 s 124.]