

## California’s Beverage Container Redemption Center Crisis: The Biggest Losers, 2019<sup>1</sup>

**California needs to restore redemption center coverage in the “recycling deserts” in the state.** Here’s why.

When it comes to beverage container recycling, California residents are among the biggest losers due to the closure of 1,366 redemption centers (RCs) since 2013. As of early October 2019, 1,213 RCs remained open statewide: just **half** the number that were operational in 2013 (2,578).

In many areas of the state, consumers now have dramatically fewer options to get their nickel and dime deposits back because they can’t conveniently return bottles and cans to nearby RCs. And these coins add up: In 2018, consumers put **\$135 million less** in their pockets from container redemption as a result of the 10% decline in the redemption rate. Over the same time period, the state’s recycling rate dropped by 10 percentage points (from 85% to 75% for all beverage containers combined).

Here’s a closer look at the impacts of the California RC closures:

- **Statewide:** In 2012, the average RC in the state served 15,520 people. By 2019, the average RC served **twice as many people** (32,450).
- **Bay Area and “Recycling Deserts”:** In 2019, the state’s 10 worst-served counties – nine of them in the San Francisco Bay Area – have, on average, only one RC for every 129,487 people. This marks a **315% increase over 2012**, when the average RC in these same counties served 31,185 people, as Table 1 shows:

Table 1. Counties with the Worst Access to Redemption Centers (a)				
County	People served per single redemption center		Change, 2012 - 2019	
	2012	2019 (c)	#	%
San Mateo	29,577	256,515	226,938	767%
San Francisco	37,683	220,826	183,143	486%
Santa Clara	31,696	161,464	129,768	409%
Marin	85,357	129,833	44,476	52%
Alameda	30,473	104,172	73,699	242%
Sonoma	20,420	99,988	79,569	390%
Contra Costa	25,660	95,851	70,191	274%
Santa Cruz	19,030	91,418	72,389	380%
San Luis Obispo	13,709	71,003	57,293	418%
Solano	18,248	63,801	45,554	250%
<b>10-county average (b)</b>	<b>31,185</b>	<b>129,487</b>	<b>98,302</b>	<b>315%</b>

(a) Alpine and Sierra Counties have no redemption centers to serve their 4,000 residents.  
 (b) The statewide average was 15,520 in 2012, and 32,450 in 2019.  
 (c) CalRecycle data accessed on Sept. 6, 2019. 2012 is a year-end number.

<sup>1</sup> This is the second edition of this Fact Sheet. The first was published on July 7, 2017.

- **Southern California:** From 2012 into 2019, Los Angeles County lost more than 200 centers, as Table 2 shows. Riverside and Sacramento Counties each lost 88 RCs, while Orange, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties lost 86, 84, and 82 RCs, respectively.

County	Number of RCs per county		Change, 2012 - 2019		People served per redemption center, 2019
	2012	2019	# Lost	% Lost	
Los Angeles	585	384	-201	-34%	26,316
Riverside	146	58	-88	-60%	42,254
Sacramento	132	44	-88	-67%	35,022
Orange	150	64	-86	-57%	49,781
San Bernardino	156	72	-84	-54%	30,161
San Diego	143	61	-82	-57%	54,809
Kern	128	82	-46	-36%	10,936
Santa Clara	58	12	-46	-79%	161,464
Alameda	51	16	-35	-69%	104,172
San Joaquin	59	24	-35	-59%	31,361

**Thirteen counties in the state have lost more than two-thirds of their RCs.** Table 3 shows the 10 biggest losers.

Consumers are not the only ones losing out. According to CalRecycle, glass volumes taken to redemption centers have fallen 16% since 2013. This reduction has financially harmed many other stakeholders besides consumers: recyclers, materials recovery facilities (MRFs), glass bottle manufacturers, fiberglass manufacturers, the state Beverage Container Recycling Fund, and the environment (since more glass ends up in landfills).

As the Container Recycling Institute (CRI) has previously reported, redemption centers in the state have been underpaid by more than \$67 million since 2012. Payments need to be restored to a profitable level, and CalRecycle needs to create a plan to restore the RC infrastructure, especially in areas that have been hardest hit. That would be a big win for California.

County	Number of RCs per county		Change, 2012 - 2019		People served per redemption center, 2019
	2012	2019	# Lost	% Lost	
Butte	35	4	-31	-89%	57,814
San Mateo	25	3	-22	-88%	256,515
San Francisco	22	4	-18	-82%	220,826
San Luis Obispo	20	4	-16	-80%	71,003
Santa Clara	58	12	-46	-79%	161,464
Sonoma	24	5	-19	-79%	99,988
Santa Cruz	14	3	-11	-79%	91,418
Contra Costa	42	12	-30	-71%	95,851
Solano	23	7	-16	-70%	63,801
Alameda	51	16	-35	-69%	104,172

**About the [Container Recycling Institute \(CRI\)](#):** The nonprofit CRI is a leading authority on the economic and environmental impacts of used beverage containers and other consumer product packaging. Its mission is to make North America a global model for the collection and quality recycling of packaging materials.