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U.K. Deposit Return Scheme appoints five firms to build returns network

Six processing sites are due to open by October 2027, creating about 700 jobs across the country.

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The organization leading the rollout of the United Kingdom’s Deposit Return Scheme has appointed five waste management and recycling companies to build the collection network that will handle returned drinks containers when the system starts in October 2027.

Exchange for Change, the industry-led body delivering the scheme, said the companies will collect bottles and cans from return points and process the material so it can be recycled into new drinks containers. The scheme will apply a 20p deposit to single-use PET plastic, aluminum, and steel drinks containers sold in sizes from 150ml to 3L. Consumers will be able to reclaim that deposit when they bring the empty containers back to a return point.

The five companies and their assigned areas are SUEZ for the North-East, North-West, West-Central, and South West; CIRQLR for the East Central, South, and South East; Re.Group for Scotland in partnership with Hargreaves Services plc; Bywaters for London; and Re-Gen for Northern Ireland.

Exchange for Change said the network will be supported by six facilities that are due to be operating by October 2027. They include three dedicated processing sites in Scotland, Scunthorpe, and Guildford; two dedicated processing lines in the Isle of Dogs

and Newry; and a shared-use plastics recycling facility in Avonmouth. The organization said those centers are expected to create about 700 jobs across the UK.

Russell Davies, chief executive of Exchange for Change, said the five providers will form what he described as a resilient and scalable network for collecting and processing materials covered by the Deposit Return Scheme.

The announcement comes as Phase 1 registration opens for producers and retailer return points. Businesses that fall under the rules are now being asked to submit basic information, including company details, a main contact, trading name, and relevant business and mailing addresses, through a new registration portal operated by Exchange for Change.

The registration process is being staggered ahead of the October 2027 launch. Phase 2 is set to open in January 2027, when companies will be asked for more detailed information linked to their role in the system.

Under the rules, retailers in urban areas with less than 100m² of space are automatically exempt from having to run a return point. Those businesses do not need to register unless they plan to offer a return service voluntarily.

The rollout is likely to be closely watched across the drinks industry because it will affect how covered beverages are sold, collected, and recycled. For companies that place drinks on the market in PET plastic, aluminum, or steel containers, including many soft drink, beer, cider, energy drink, and ready-to-drink alcohol brands, the scheme may require changes in labeling, logistics, store operations, and contracts for collection and material handling. It could also influence packaging decisions as producers and retailers prepare for the return system and the recycling standards that come with it.

The UK scheme is intended to increase the recovery of drinks packaging and create a more reliable supply of material that can be turned back into new containers. The latest infrastructure appointments and the opening of registration mark a shift from policy design to practical implementation, with producers, retailers, and recycling operators now moving into the early stages of compliance planning ahead of the 2027 start date.