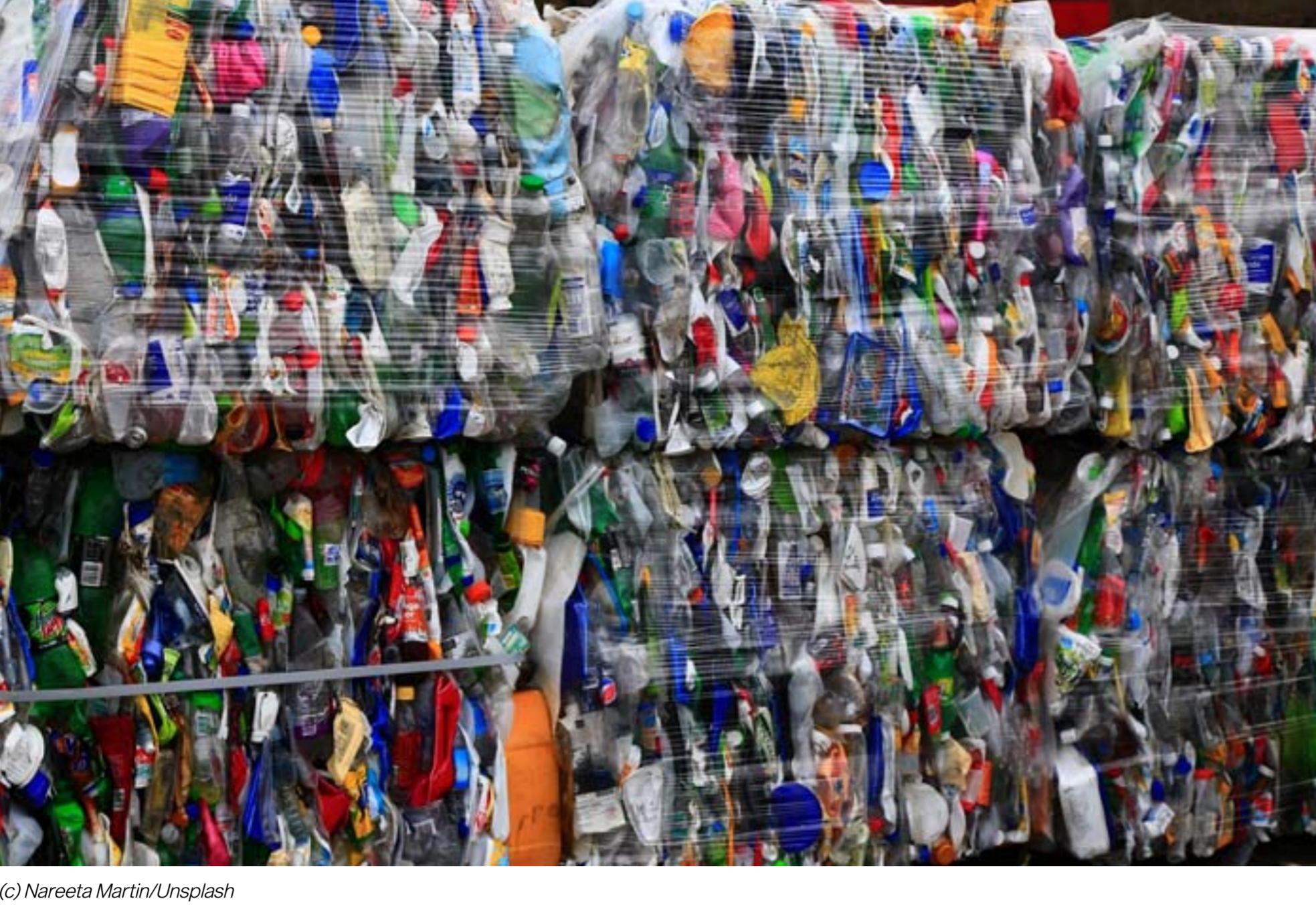


Austria To Launch Plastic Bottle Deposit System in 2025

By Gregory Manni October 20, 2021



(c) Nareeta Martin/Unsplash

The deposit system will levy a tax on consumers to incentivize recycling plastic bottles and cans—a strategy many countries have been using for years.

More than 56,000 tons of plastic bottles and cans are produced in Austria every year, and 15,000 tons never make it to the recycling bin. That’s approximately 1 billion bottles and cans going to the incinerator—or worse, polluting streets, parks and streams.

In an effort to stop the litter, the Council of Ministers passed an amendment to Austria’s Waste Management Act in October, though the change is still years away. The law would introduce an “Einwegpfand” in 2025—a deposit system aimed at increasing the return rate of single-use bottles and cans, and incentivizing consumers to do the collecting.

It’s the third in a list of major environmental objectives announced by the ÖVP-Green coalition in recent months, preceded by the introduction of a national carbon tax to come in 2022, and the release of a “climate ticket” for public transit this October.

“Less trash out in nature—that’s our big goal,” says Environment Minister Leonore Gewessler (Green). She says the deposit system will “improve recycling, ensuring that a bottle becomes a bottle again and a can becomes a can.”

The deposit system would add a small tax to every purchase of a plastic bottle or metal can, just like the “pfand” attached to every glass beer bottle bought at the supermarket. Customers who collect and return the empty bottles would get their deposit back. The amendment still needs to pass through parliament, and many of the details are yet to be announced, such as how high the bottle tax will be.

The law would also set a new requirement in motion for larger stores, which would be required to gradually begin offering reusable bottles in all beverage areas starting in 2024, granting customers the choice to purchase more sustainably. Different than one-time “throwaway” bottles, reusable ones come in standard sizes, can be used by multiple companies, and are sanitized and relabeled before going back to the beverage aisle.

“By making reusable bottles a mandatory option, we are bringing back the freedom to choose. I want everyone who wants reusable bottles to have them,” Gewessler says. “Not only for beer, but also for juices, mineral water or milk.”

But even with these changes, Austria has a long way to go in developing a circular economy—a stated goal of the country’s Federal Chancellery—especially when it comes to plastic recycling. As climate scientists intensify calls to limit global energy consumption and end fossil fuel use, Austria’s practices regarding disposable beverage packaging alone represent a huge energy loss.



Environment Minister Leonore Gewessler (c) BMK / Cajetan Perwein

Kicking the can down the road

Manufacturing bottles with recycled plastic as opposed to raw material can save up to 88% of production energy, according to research by the U.S. EPA. For aluminum cans, the energy savings are up to 95%. Using less energy means burning fewer fossil fuels, leading to a reduced climate impact. By failing to collect and recycle roughly 700 million plastic bottles every year, Austria is emitting the CO2 equivalent of 350,000 barrels of oil in energy lost to production. That’s enough energy to power Vienna’s entire public transit system for nearly four months out of the year.

Austria is giving itself three and a half years to begin implementation, making it far slower than in neighboring countries. Germany was able to implement its own system in 2003 after passing a law just nine months earlier. Croatia did the same starting in 2006, and passed its law the previous July. If well-implemented, nationwide bottle deposit systems are proven to increase recycling rates, and can increase plastic bottle returns to between 80% and 95%, according to a UK study. For Austria, that jump could represent up to 600 million plastic bottles saved from the dump. So why wait?

The reasons are unclear, but one thing is certain: the governing coalition isn’t required to act sooner. Austria’s “Einwegpfand” was passed as recycling targets set by the EU Commission are starting to come over the horizon—but those deadlines are still far off. The Commission stipulates that EU member countries must hit a collection rate of 77% for single-use plastic bottles by 2025, and 90% by 2029. Austria’s current rate falls short of the first target at 70%. Whether there is a collective will to clean up more quickly remains to be seen.

RECENT ARTICLES

- 3 Museums in Vienna You Can Go to for Free
By Metropole
- The Best Halloween Events in Vienna for Adults
By Bruna Novo
- Spotlight on Afghanistan at Vienna Migration Conference
By Metropole
- Hollywood Star Matt Dillon at the 59th Viennale
By Metropole
- Vienna Is On OnlyFans: Our Cultural Capital Gets Naked
By Naomi Hunt
- Practical Guide to Men’s Mental Health in Vienna
By Ryan Powell

PICK OF THE DAY



Vienna Survival Guide for Housing

€ 19.90 incl. tax Buy Now



METROPOLE NEWSLETTER

Join over 5,000 Metropolitans, who already get monthly updates and event invitations.

First name

Last name

Email

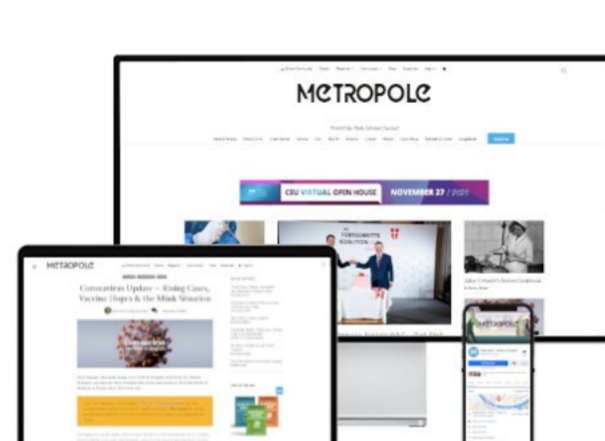
SIGN UP NOW

CURRENT ISSUE

- The Black Box of Media Funding in Austria
By Ryan Powell
- Graz: Where it’s Easy Being Green
By Amina Frassl
- Fall 2021 | Prost!
By Ryan Powell
- How To... Become an Austrian Sommelier
By Simon Ballam
- Michael Häupl and The Spirit of Spritzwein
By Maggie Childs

You’ve been reading Metropole’s free online content. Enjoy unlimited access to Metropole by [subscribing for €4/month](#). [Visibility issues? Refresh page here](#)

All-access Digital



- ✓ Unlimited access to all metropole.at content
- ✓ Daily in-depth coronavirus updates
- ✓ Access to Metropole e-paper
- ✓ Access to all print feature articles online
- ✓ Event invitations
- ✓ Weekly & monthly newsletter
- ✓ No targeted ads

Subscribe

Print & Digital



- ✓ 4 print issues of Metropole, delivered to your home or office
- ✓ Unlimited access to Metropole e-paper
- ✓ Unlimited access to all print feature articles online
- ✓ Weekly & monthly newsletters
- ✓ Free access to all Metropole events
- ✓ Special offers & sweepstakes
- ✓ No targeted ads
- ✓ And much more!

Subscribe

Not ready to subscribe yet? [Sign up for the Metropole newsletter](#)



Gregory Manni

Gregory Manni grew up between Detroit’s suburban sprawl and Lake Michigan’s shoreline, and has since become a disciple of ecology, poetry, and story. He moved to Austria in 2021 to see about a girl, and his current aim is beating back climate change through the act of writing. He tweets at @gregory_manni.

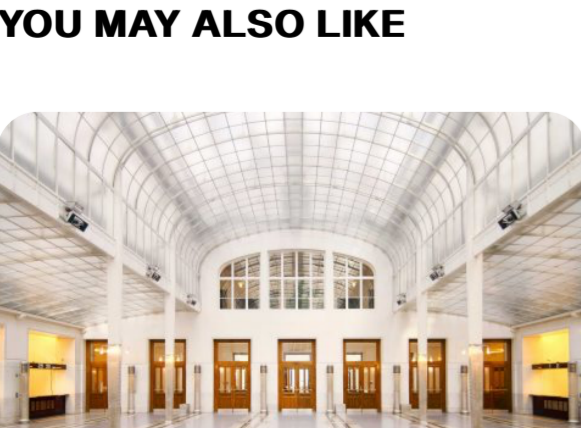
PREVIOUS ARTICLE

Austrian President Congratulates Greenpeace

NEXT ARTICLE

Metropole’s Ten Films to Watch at the Viennale 2021

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE



3 Museums in Vienna You Can Go to for Free
By Metropole



Assisted Dying in Austria to be Permitted from 2022
By Naomi Hunt



The Best Halloween Events in Vienna for Adults
By Bruna Novo

Company

- About Us
- Our Team
- Jobs @ Metropole
- Editorial Mission

Contact

- Contact Us
- Advertise
- Find Metropole
- Donate

Subscription

- Newsletter
- Subscribe
- Student Discount
- Online Archive
- FAQs

Resources

- Job board
- Video
- The Hello Pages
- Expat Services