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OBRC Announces Patent on New Container Counting Technology that Adds Speed, Efficiency and Convenience to Beverage Container Redemption in Oregon – and beyond

OBRC's Smart Count AI rapidly counts containers and credits customers

Clackamas, Oregon – Looking to increase the speed and efficiency of beverage container counting – and save time for customers – the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative (OBRC) has developed, and successfully patented, its Smart Count AI system. The Smart Count AI uses artificial intelligence, a neural network and specialized software to rapidly count containers by batch, critical to processing and counting the 12 million Green Bags Oregonians return each year. Developed in-house at OBRC, the technology counts beverage containers and credits customer accounts significantly faster than previous options, helping Oregon's system operate with optimal efficiency.

"Oregonians across the state return nearly 2 billion containers a year, and we needed a faster, more efficient, more accurate processing system to make sure every dime gets back to the customer," said Jules Bailey, Chief Executive Officer and President of OBRC. "Now with our patented Smart Count AI–technology developed here at OBRC – we've got a system that is all that and more."

OBRC received its patent for the Smart Count AI in January 2023. The Smart Count AI has been critical to responding to the rapid growth in Green Bag accounts in recent years, as Oregonians use convenient drop off options to receive their OR 10-cent refunds, and the BottleDrop network continues to expand to new areas of the state. In just the past five years, accounts grew 5-fold and are now approaching 1 million account holders, representing more than one BottleDrop account for every two households in Oregon.

In addition to deploying the Smart Count AI to process Green Bags, OBRC has also developed and deployed a similar technology, the Stream Count AI, which is a customer-facing front of house technology at redemption centers. The Stream Count AI allows customers at some BottleDrop Redemption Centers to empty bags of containers onto a conveyor belt, where they are instantly counted through technology similar to the Smart Count AI. Customers receive a printed voucher at the end of the transaction and can redeem it for cash immediately. What might have previously taken up to 30 minutes at a reverse vending machine can be done in a minute or two at the Stream Count AI.

OBRC has deployed the Stream Count AI technology at BottleDrop Redemption Centers in Northeast Portland and North Bend/Coos Bay, and plans to continue expanding the use of both innovative systems, elsewhere – and not just in Oregon. Already, OBRC is providing the operational solution for a pilot project in California, which includes the Smart Count AI, a dedicated mobile application, a customer account interface and mechanized material sortation equipment.

“OBRC’s patented technology allows Oregon to be the most convenient, most accurate and most efficient system in the country,” Bailey said. “We’re confident and excited about the opportunity for our innovative technology to help improve the performance of redemption systems around the world.”

About OBRC

The Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative (OBRC) is the industry steward of Oregon’s nationally recognized beverage container redemption system and operator of the BottleDrop network. Headquartered in Clackamas, Ore., OBRC is a statewide, not-for-profit cooperative, formed by the beverage industry to serve as the operational steward of Oregon’s Bottle Bill. OBRC helps keep Oregon beautiful by providing outstanding services to partners, distributors, retailers and the public for the recovery, reuse, and recycling of beverage containers. Through OBRC’s BottleDrop Redemption Centers and container pickup service for more than 2,000 retail partners, the co-op recycles nearly two billion beverage containers annually, protecting the Oregon we love, supporting the causes we cherish, and inspiring innovation beyond our borders – all without any taxpayer funding. To learn more, visit bottledrop.com or obrc.com