

C-stores in Vermont grapple with sweet drinks tax

Vermont's tax on soda and sugary beverages is receiving bittersweet reactions from consumers and retailers.

The six percent sales tax went into effect on July 1 but some grocery and convenience stores in the Green Mountain state are still confused on how to implement it.

The tax, which intends to curb consumption of sweetened beverages, has been improperly applied on unsweetened seltzers. Consumers who then opt to buy the healthier alternative also end up paying more, reported Vtdigger.org.

The misapplication of tax persists despite the state's tax department listing of "plain or flavored club soda or seltzer water with no sweeteners" as a non-taxable item.

Jim Harrison, president of the Vermont Retail and Grocers Association, complains about the definition of soft drinks and wished that the list of taxable and non-taxable items be made more specific.

Harrison added that Vermont shares the same definitions with the rest of the 23 states for all the taxable items.

Rep. Janet Ancel, D-Calais, chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means, who supported the bill, said that the streamlined tax definitions have been successful in other states and she's optimistic that these implementation issues will be overcome.

On the other hand, the leading proponent of the failed 2 cents per ounce excise tax bill on sugary beverages Rep. George Till, D-Jericho said that this sales tax is good but not sufficient to combat obesity.

According to 2014 State of Obesity Report, Vermont has one of the lowest obesity rates in the country. However, the 2011 survey in the report says that approximately 62 percent of adult Vermonters are overweight and/or obese and around 11.3 percent of children aged 10 through 17 are obese.