Deposit Return Scheme Non-standard container testing

How to submit products for RVM acceptance testing

Step-by-step guidance for producers

exchange for change

Purpose: This guidance explains how to identify a non-standard, in-scope beverage container and submit samples to RECOUP for Reverse Vending Machine (RVM) acceptance testing.

About the testing service

Exchange For Change has commissioned RECOUP, a leading UK authority on resource recycling and testing, to provide independent testing of non-standard beverage containers across multiple RVMs as part of the RVM acceptance programme.

The service is intended for containers that may be difficult for an RVM to recognise, accept or process ahead of the launch of the Deposit Return Scheme.

Testing will determine whether a container can be successfully accepted and processed across different RVMs and, where it cannot, identify the reasons for non-acceptance. Containers that are not accepted by RVMs will need to be returned manually. They remain in scope of the UK DRS, and producer obligations remain unchanged.

Where appropriate, producers will also receive observations or recommendations that may help improve RVM acceptance.

Why testing is important

Testing helps identify and address potential RVM acceptance issues before launch, protecting the consumer experience, supporting scheme adoption and helping producers and retailers deliver a smooth and reliable return process.

Producer actions

1 Check that the container is within scope

Testing applies to single-use beverage containers that fall within the scope of the UK Deposit Return Scheme.

Scope check	Requirement
Container use	Single-use beverage container
Materials	PET, aluminium or steel
Capacity	150ml to 3L inclusive

Not eligible: Containers outside the stated material or capacity requirements should not be submitted through this testing service.

2 Check the container dimensions

Measure the container in its normal, complete form. Measure its full height, including any fitted cap or closure, and its width at the widest point.

Requirement	Specification
Minimum width	50 mm
Maximum width	125 mm
Minimum height	75 mm
Maximum height	360 mm
Width compared with height	Width must not exceed height
Height measurement	Include the cap or closure

Testing trigger: If the container falls outside one or more dimensional requirements, treat it as non-standard and submit it for RVM acceptance testing.

3 Identify whether the container is non-standard

A container should be considered for testing if it is within the scheme material and capacity scope but has characteristics that could affect RVM recognition, acceptance or processing. Examples include:

- Width below 50 mm or above 125 mm
- Height below 75 mm or above 360 mm
- Width greater than the container height
- An unusual, irregular or non-cylindrical shape
- Neck heavy containers, upper part of the container touches the surface or balances on the shoulder
- A design that may be difficult to rotate including square or sqround
- An unusual material construction or combination of components
- A label, sleeve or barcode position that could affect barcode recognition
- Any other design feature that may affect how an RVM recognises, accepts or processes the container

Important: Meeting the standard dimensional requirements does not guarantee acceptance. Testing may still be needed where another design characteristic could create difficulties for an RVM.

4 Make sure every sample has a barcode

Every sample must carry a barcode because the barcode is required for RVM recognition and evaluation.

- For pre-launch testing, an existing barcode may be used.
- The barcode label position and orientation should reflect the intended presentation of the DRS-registered container.
- The existing barcode used for testing must be replaced with the appropriate registered barcode before the product is placed on the market under the DRS.

5 Prepare the samples

Provide the following for each container design requiring testing:

- 21 barcoded samples
- Empty, complete and undamaged containers
- The cap or closure fitted, where applicable
- Labels and barcodes positioned as expected on the final DRS container

Treat each variation that could affect RVM acceptance as a separate container design. Relevant changes may include shape, dimensions, material, closure, label or sleeve, and barcode position or orientation.

Example: If the same product is supplied in two significantly different bottle shapes, submit 21 samples of each shape.

6 Submit one representative sample set for identical container variants

Where several product variants, such as different flavours, use the same identical container design, producers do not need to submit a separate set of 21 samples for every variant, provided that:

- The container shape and dimensions are identical.
- The container material, closure and construction are identical.
- The label or sleeve format, position and orientation are identical.
- The barcode is positioned and oriented in the same way.
- The only relevant difference is the product variant and its barcode number.

Submit 21 samples of one representative variant for RVM acceptance testing. When confirming the shipment, provide details of every additional variant that uses the same container, including the product name or flavour and its barcode. This allows each variant to be logged against the tested container design and assigned the appropriate testing reference for use in the registration portal.

Separate samples are required where a variant changes any feature that could affect RVM recognition, acceptance or processing, including the container shape, dimensions, material, closure, label or sleeve format, label placement, or barcode position or orientation.

Example: If five flavours use the same bottle, closure and label placement, but each flavour has a different barcode, submit 21 samples of one flavour and provide the product and barcode details for all five variants.

7 Submit one representative sample set for identical container variants

Package samples securely to prevent crushing, deformation or damage. Send them by recorded delivery to:

DRS Product Testing
1 Metro Centre
Welbeck Way
Peterborough
PE2 7UH
United Kingdom

Keep the courier tracking number or proof of delivery until receipt has been confirmed.

8 Email the shipment details

After sending the samples, email DRS@RECOUP.org to confirm the shipment. Include the following information for each container design:

Required information	What to provide
Company	Producer legal or trading name
Contact name	Primary contact for results
Email address	Contact email address
Brand	Brand shown on the container
Container capacity	Capacity in millilitres
Container material	PET, aluminium, steel or mixed material
Container type	For example, bottle or can
Samples shipped date	Date the samples were sent
Delivery tracking number	Courier or recorded-delivery reference
Related product variants	For every identical-container variant, provide the product name or flavour and barcode number

Suggested subject line: DRS RVM acceptance testing: [Company] - [Brand and container size]

9 RVM acceptance testing

RECOUP will test the samples across multiple manufacturers' RVMs. Testing may consider whether the RVM can:

- Detect and read the barcode
- Recognise the container
- Accept the container through the infeed
- Handle and transport the container internally
- Complete the required processing or compaction stage, where applicable

10 Receive the test results

The producer will receive either:

- Confirmation that the container was accepted across the RVMs tested; or
- A non-acceptance report explaining where the container was rejected and, where identifiable, the reason for rejection.

The report may also include observations and recommendations intended to help improve acceptance.

Using the RVM acceptance testing reference code

Each tested container design will be assigned a unique testing reference code. The reference code will be shared on receipt of samples and included with the testing outcome. It must be entered into the product registration portal to confirm that RVM acceptance testing has been completed.

Where multiple product variants use the same identical tested container design, the variants and their barcodes must have been provided and logged against that design. Producers can then use the assigned testing reference code when registering those linked variants in the portal.

Keep the code: Retain the testing report and unique reference code as part of the product's DRS readiness records. The code will be required to confirm RVM acceptance in the registration portal.

11 Take any required follow-up action

If the container is accepted, retain the confirmation and unique RVM acceptance testing reference code as part of the product's DRS readiness records. Enter the reference code in the registration portal when registering the tested container and any linked variants.

If the container is not accepted:

1. Review the reasons provided in the report.
2. Discuss the findings with the relevant packaging, labelling or barcode teams.
3. Consider whether the container design, label, sleeve, closure or barcode placement needs to change.
4. Contact Exchange For Change if clarification is required.
5. Where a material change is made, confirm whether revised samples must be submitted for further testing.

Questions: Contact enquiries@exchangeforchange.co.uk if you would like to discuss the testing programme.

Important information

- Containers not accepted via Reverse Vending Machines will need to be returned manually. They remain IN-SCOPE for UK DRS. Producer obligations remain unchanged.
- Testing confirms performance only across the RVMs and test conditions included in the programme.
- Successful testing does not replace the producer's obligation to register the product correctly or comply with scheme material, capacity, barcode and labelling requirements.
- A significant change to the container design, dimensions, material, closure, label, sleeve or barcode placement may affect RVM acceptance and could require further assessment.
- Containers outside the stated DRS material or capacity scope should not be submitted through this testing service.