



NEWS RELEASE

Return-It Launches Its First Wine Cork Collection Pilot in Kelowna

Used corks collected at the Return-It Boucherie Self Storage and Bottle Depot will be recycled into sustainable footwear material

Kelowna, British Columbia – June 1, 2021 – Consumers who enjoy a glass of wine this patio season can feel even better knowing every part of the bottle will be recycled. Starting today, thanks to a new partnership, used natural wine corks collected at the Return-It Boucherie Self Storage and Bottle Depot in Kelowna will be recycled into eco-friendly footwear.

The new initiative is a strategic partnership between Return-It, an industry owned, not-for-profit, product stewardship agency with beverage container management as its core mandate; ReCORK, North America's largest natural wine cork recycling program; and SOLE, a manufacturer of sustainable footwear that turns used wine corks into an ecologically-friendly replacement for fossil fuel-derived foams.

Once consumers have dropped off their used, natural wine corks at the collection facility, the material will be sent to ReCORK for processing, then used by SOLE to manufacture eco-friendly alternatives to environmentally-harmful materials for shoes and sandals.

The partnership is the latest example of how Return-It is leveraging its collection network to divert material from the landfill and support the development of innovative products that help protect our natural environment. The pilot program reflects Return-It's social purpose to foster a world where nothing is waste – creating a better future for people, communities and the planet through recycling, education and strategic partnerships.

“We recognized an opportunity to collect this useful material, and work with processing and manufacturing partners to give it a new life,” said Allen Langdon, President and CEO of Return-It. “By utilizing our resources and systems, we are adding an exciting new element to our ongoing work around diverting material from the landfill and keeping it in our economy. This initiative is another example of how we’re engaged in a more circular vision of how our society can operate as we work towards circular solutions.”

“The benefits of cork extend well beyond bottle stoppers,” said Mike Baker, CEO of ReCORK and SOLE. “As a lifetime runner, I can attest to the comfort and performance benefits of natural cork insoles. By working with Return-It to collect used corks, we are able to give new life to this adaptable natural resource. It’s a progressive partnership that makes sense in so many ways.”

The initiative is aligned with British Columbia’s wine industry, which continues to place a clear priority on sustainability objectives.

“Just as Return-It is working hard to support circular solutions through collection and landfill diversion, B.C.’s wine industry is committed to supporting sustainable practices that protect our beautiful natural environment for future generations,” said Karen Gillis, Chair, Sustainable Wine Growing BC and Vineyard Operations Manager, Andrew Peller Ltd. “This new cork recycling initiative represents a positive step forward in our ongoing efforts to reduce waste and maximize the use of our natural resources.”



Based on the results and success of the pilot, Return-It will evaluate implementing this initiative at other collection facilities throughout the province.

The Power of Cork

Sustainably harvested from trees, cork is a carbon-negative material that can be repurposed into new consumer items like footwear cushioning to help replace petroleum-based foams and plastics. As an important climate benefit, cork oak forests continue absorbing CO₂ after the bark is removed.

- For each tonne of cork harvested, the forest absorbs 70 tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere.¹
- Harvesting the bark boosts the cork oak tree's carbon consumption three to five times, and can extend the tree's lifespan to over 300 years.²
- Each pair of recycled cork footbeds, shoes and sandals contains between 22 and 60 wine corks.³ In addition to being environmentally friendly, cork footwear cushioning is naturally elastic, moisture-wicking, odour-reducing, foot-molding and supportive.

About Return-It

Return-It is an industry owned, not-for-profit, product stewardship agency with beverage container management as its core business. Return-It recycles approximately 1 billion beverage containers a year. Its mandate is to develop, manage and improve systems to recover used packaging and end-of-life products from consumers to ensure they are properly recycled and diverted from the natural environment. This work includes the development and implementation of initiatives that provide new solutions to reduce waste, such as its province-wide program to repurpose and recycle used clothing and other textiles. Return-It is a founding member of the Canada Plastics Pact, and has made a global commitment through the Ellen MacArthur Foundation to help eliminate plastic pollution at the source. In 2021, Return-It broadened its commitment to sustainability by announcing its social purpose, which is aimed at creating a better future for people, communities and the planet: *We exist to foster a world where nothing is waste.*

[Return-It.ca](https://return-it.ca)

About Sustainable Winegrowing British Columbia

Sustainable Winegrowing BC is an ongoing program of the British Columbia Wine Grape Council (BCWGC), managing sustainability certification as well as providing educational resources and training to help vineyards and wineries establish sustainable practices. The purpose of the BCWGC is to coordinate, facilitate, and fund research and education on viticulture and enology to broadly benefit the British Columbia wine grape industry and to represent growers on a variety of agriculture-related issues.

[BCWGC.org/sustainable-winegrowing-british-columbia](https://bcwgc.org/sustainable-winegrowing-british-columbia)

About ReCORK

ReCORK is North America's largest natural wine cork recycling program, launched by Canadian footwear company SOLE. As an alliance of businesses and individuals who work together to collect and repurpose natural wine corks, ReCORK uses the material to innovate and create natural, sustainable alternatives to petroleum-based foams and plastics. They have collected more than 110 million corks for recycling.

<https://recork.com/ca/> and <https://yoursole.com/ca/story>

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¹ CO₂--: <https://co2neg.com/power-of-cork>

² ReCORK: <https://recork.com/us/en/how-it-works>

³ SOLE: <https://yoursole.com/us/our-materials-recycled-cork>