

If aluminum pull tab redemption is a rumor, what happens to all the tabs?

 devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20091027-01

October 27, 2009



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Everybody should know by now that it is not true that pull tabs from aluminum cans can be redeemed for time on a dialysis machine. Of course, not everybody actually knows this, and then the next question is, well, what happens to all those pull tabs collected by misinformed people? The Snopes article explains that it depends on where you turn in the tabs. They might get recycled at the going scrap rate and the proceeds donated to the National Kidney Foundation or the Ronald McDonald House. But I was most fascinated by this resourceful researcher who played the game of “follow the tabs” from a State Police office to a high school to a hospital to the Shriners to a library to a community college, where the trail finally runs cold. I related this story to a friend of mine, who did a double-take. “Wait a second. That guy where the trail runs cold? I know that guy. I used to work for him!”

That the trail runs cold was hardly surprising to my friend. Apparently, my friend’s former boss was the sort of person who would never admit that he made a mistake, no matter how obvious the error. My friend speculated that when his boss discovered that nobody would take the aluminum pull tabs, he certainly wasn’t going to admit, “Oops, sorry everybody.” In order to keep up appearances, he had to keep collecting them, even though he had nowhere to dispose of them. And of course, all the independent pull-tab collectors who couldn’t find anybody to give them to gradually learned about this guy who will take them, which meant that more and more of them kept coming in. My friend figured, “He probably has an enormous pile of aluminum pull tabs just sitting in his garage.”

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