

BOTTLED WATER

American consumers drink vast quantities of bottled water, in part because they have bought into the idea that it is somehow safer than tap water. Collectively we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars per gallon for water in plastic bottles, when tap water is generally safer and cleaner than bottled water. By taking back the tap, you can save money, protect your health, and help prevent environmental and social problems as well.

SAFETY

Despite what many consumers are led to believe, bottled water is no safer or purer than tap water. In fact, some bottled water is simply municipal water that has been wastefully packaged, falsely labeled as pristine spring water, and sold at an exorbitant price. According to the National Resources Defense Council, as much as 40

percent of bottled water is actually from a tap.

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What's more, by federal law tap water from municipal sources is rigorously and frequently tested. The Environmental Protection Agency requires utility companies to test municipal water hundreds of times per month, while the Food and

Drug Administration requires bottling companies to test their supply only once per week.

The inadequacy of bottled water regulations was documented by the National Resources Defense Council in 1999, which tested 1,000 bottles from 103 brands and found bacteria, carcinogens, and other chemicals in a significant number of the products. Some of these contaminants can be traced to the water source, others are byproducts of the purification process, and still others leach from the plastic bottle.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

In addition to helping individuals avoid contaminants, giving up bottled water also benefits the environment. Annual production of the plastic (PET or polyethylene) bottles required to meet U.S. consumer demand for bottled water uses about 17.6 million barrels of oil, not including the cost of transporting the product to consumers. That is about the amount required to fuel at least one million vehicles

each year. Worldwide, bottling of water uses about 2.7 million tons of plastic each year. In the end, about 86% of empty plastic water bottles in the United States land in the garbage, waterways, or the ocean, instead of being recycled. This means approximately two million tons of PET plastic bottles pile up in U.S. landfills each year.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Beverage companies also harm communities with their bottled water operations. The companies extract vast quantities of water that local people need, making huge profits and leaving communities with depleted resources in addition to economic and environmental problems. Despite promises that bottling operations will bring employment, in reality they create few new jobs, and those few are dangerous and low-paid.

COST

Turning to tap water will not only benefit communities, the environment, and consumer safety, it saves money as well. While bottled water can cost between \$0.89 and \$8.26 per gallon, tap water typically only costs about \$0.002 per gallon.

GIVING UP BOTTLED WATER IS NOT ENOUGH

Although the majority of U.S. tap water is clean, safe, and healthy, public water systems in some communities fall short of consistently meeting EPA safety standards. These violations can stem from some combination of pollution of

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BOTTLED WATER (cont'd)

the water source, inadequate water treatment, or deteriorating infrastructure (e.g., pipes that carry water can contain lead or can be old and falling apart).

Most of the primary water pipes and sewer lines in the United States were built during the late 1800s, the 1920s, and in the years immediately following World War II. They are wearing out under the weight of time and increasing demand. Old, corroded water lines break, not only wasting water but also opening avenues for contamination. Worn out or overburdened sewage systems overflow into our streams, rivers, lakes, and oceans, creating serious health concerns.

Every year, Congress debates proposals for funding clean drinking water. A 2007 bill provided \$14 billion in federal loan guarantees over four years for water and sewer improvements. While the bill passed the House of Representatives, it has not yet passed the Senate. Unfortunately, even if it were to become law, it would still be insufficient in meeting our nation's water infrastructure needs.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ☉ Plastic bottle production in the United States annually requires about 17.6 million barrels of oil, enough to fuel at least one million cars.
- ☉ About 86 percent of empty plastic water bottles in the United States land in the garbage instead of being recycled. That amounts to about two million tons of PET plastic bottles piling up in U.S. landfills each year.
- ☉ Bottled water typically costs more than \$1 for eight to 12 ounces, amounting to more than \$10 per gallon. Most Americans pay \$0.002 per gallon for tap water.
- ☉ In a Natural Resources Defense Council study of 103 bottled water brands, about one-quarter contained bacterial or chemical contamination in some samples at levels that violated enforceable state standards or warning levels.

What You Can Do...

- ☉ Choose tap water over bottled water whenever possible.



To find sustainably raised food near you visit www.eatwellguide.org.

Find more detailed information about water on our website at www.sustainabletable.org/issues/water.