

## **Bottled Water**

[www.allaboutwater.org](http://www.allaboutwater.org)

[www.container-recycling.org/plasfact/bottledwater.htm](http://www.container-recycling.org/plasfact/bottledwater.htm)

<http://www.reusablebags.com/store/reusable-bottles-c-19.html>

### **The Effects of Bottled Water on the Environment**

It is hard to argue the fact that waste management has become a large problem in the world, with landfills growing to enormous sizes and recycling rates remaining dismally low. The number of plastic bottles produced by the bottled water industry and subsequently discarded by consumers has only exacerbated this problem.

According to a 2001 report of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), roughly 1.5 million tons of plastic are expended in the bottling of 89 billion liters of water each year.

Besides the sheer number of plastic bottles produced each year, the energy required to manufacture and transport these bottles to market severely drains limited fossil fuels. Bottled water companies, due to their unregulated use of valuable resources and their production of billions of plastic bottles have presented a significant strain on the environment.

The authors of the WWF report suggested that water bottles be washed and reused in order to lessen their negative impact on the environment. Unfortunately, reusing plastic bottles further compromises the quality of the water, due to the fact that more and more phthalate leaches its way into the water as the bottle gets older. In another suggestion, the authors recommended that bottled water companies use local bottling facilities in order to lessen fuel expenditures for transportation needs. Regrettably, local bottling further compromises water quality due to the reduced health standards for in-state bottled water production and consumption. It seems there is no feasible solution to this problem. The bottled water industry causes a severe strain on the environment, but solutions to this environmental damage significantly lessen the quality of water in the bottles.

### **Natural Spring Water or Reconstituted Tap Water?**

Recent allegations against the Coca-Cola Company and its brand name of bottled water, Dasani, have publicly highlighted one of the biggest misconceptions about the quality of bottled water. Coca-Cola, advertising its bottled water as “pure, still water,” is now being investigated for misleading consumers about the true nature of the contents of its bottles. Rather than deriving its water from natural springs, Coca-Cola had actually been filling its Dasani bottles with purified tap water.

Of course, this problem of reconstituted tap water in Dasani bottles would not be so large if it was an isolated incident. Unfortunately, the process of bottling tap water is not limited to the Coca-Cola Company. In 1999, the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) published the results of a four-year study in which researchers tested more than 1,000 samples of 103 brands of bottled water. These researchers found that,

“An estimated 25 percent or more of bottled water is really just tap water in a bottle—sometimes further treated, sometimes not.”

In one case, a brand of bottled water, advertised as “pure, glacier water,” was found to be taken from a municipal water supply while another brand, flaunted as “spring water,” was pumped from a water source next to a hazardous waste dumping site. While “purified tap water” is arguably safer and purer than untreated tap water (depending upon the purification methods), a consumer should expect to receive something more than reconstituted tap water for the exceptional prices of bottled water. If bottled water does not necessarily offer purer water than tap water, surely it provides a better tasting water product, right? The answer to this question is no. Bottled water does not always taste better than tap water.

In an interesting study conducted by Showtime television, the hosts found that 75% of tested New York City residents actually preferred tap water over bottled water in a blind taste test. While taste is certainly highly subjective, this study shows that bottled water essentially holds nothing over tap water. In many cases, bottled water is no purer than tap water, and it may not even taste better.

Bottled water creates trash and uses energy.

Bottled water creates more trash and uses more energy than a re-useable bottle refilled from the tap. Disposable plastic bottles fill our landfills and take up to 1000 years to biodegrade. They also require substantial energy to manufacture, fill and transport. The majority of the energy used comes from fossil fuels like oil and coal, which emit carbon dioxide and are a primary cause of global warming. Tap water in the U.S. is clean and safe.

In the U.S. we are blessed with a system to provide safe tap water, which is subject to dozens of state and federal regulations and testing requirements. Testing standards for bottled water are much less strict. Although the majority of bottled water is safe and pure, a Natural Resources Defense Council study tested 103 brands of bottled water and found that 34 of them exceeded either a state-enforceable standard for bacterial or chemical contamination, or a non-enforceable microbiological-purity (HPC) guideline, or both.

*Please note that not all countries have tap water that is safe to drink. When traveling abroad, refer to travel guides and web resources to determine how safe the tap water is.*

Bottled water is expensive.

Bottled water can cost as much as \$10 per gallon—much more than a gallon of gasoline. A 2006 report found that globally we spend \$100 billion on bottled water.