Bottled Water Impacts On Communities: Take Back The Tap

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The Three Major Bottled Water Companies

- Nestlé Waters, PepsiCo (Aquafina) and Coca-Cola (Dasani)

- By revenue Nestlé is the biggest food company in the world

- Nestlé Waters is the leading bottled water company worldwide, selling water under several brand names, including Poland Springs, Pure Life, Arrowhead, Poland Spring, Deer Park, Ice Mountain, Zephyrhills
Bottled Water Trends

Over the past three decades, from the 1970s until the recession, per capita bottled water consumption in the United States has increased nearly 20-fold.

- **1976**: The average American consumed 1.6 gallons of bottled water annually
- **1986**: Consumers were drinking more than three times that amount
- **1996**: Annual per capita consumption had spiked to 12.6 gallons
- **Over the next decade**: the bottled water industry saw tremendous growth, and by 2007, each person in the country consumed an average of 29 gallons of bottled water a year.
- **2011**: the average American drank 29 gallons of bottled water each year.
Bottled Water Trends

**Figure 2.**

**Figure 3.**

The Purity Hype - Nestlé’s Latest Marketing Strategies

2004 to 2009: The share of the bottled water market that comes from municipal tap water supplies increased 14.3 percentage points — from about one-third to nearly half of the total volume sold.

- Beverage Marketing Corporation attributed much of this trend — the shift from spring water to tap water — to Nestlé Pure Life

2005: Through its Pure Life brand, Nestlé began shifting production from spring water to tap water.

2009: Nestlé Pure Life was the most advertised bottled water brand in the country with nearly $10 million spent, mostly on television ads

Between 2008 and 2009: Nestlé Pure Life grew by 18% when almost all other major bottled water brands declined and industry-wide sales decreased by 5%

- This may be due to the fact that Nestlé Waters increased advertising expenditures on the brand by 3,000 percent, from $0.3 million in 2004 to $9.7 million in 2009.
Expanding Emerging Markets and Targeting Minority Groups

Nestlé Waters is shifting the target of its marketing from its traditional customer base in the United States, Canada and Europe to Latino immigrants in the United States and “emerging markets” in the rest of the world.

This seems to be a strategic move to hype the purity of its bottled water to populations that historically may have lacked access to safe tap water.
Nestlé Waters Sales Trends

- From 2007 to 2012, Nestlé’s total bottled water sales fell by 31 percent
  - Sales fell 28 percent in the United States and Canada,
  - Dropped 51 percent in Europe,
  - But boomed in emerging markets by 73 percent

**Figure 5. Nestlé Waters Sales by Region, in Billions of Swiss Francs**

Expanding Emerging Markets

But the world’s citizens who most need safe water are the ones least likely to be able to afford bottled water.
Targeting Minority Groups In The U.S.

• **A brand manager at Nestlé Pure Life explained to advertising magazine *Brandweek* in 2008:**
  • “Hispanics have known the brand for many years, so this is an opportunity for us to put the brand out there and create an emotional connection with them here [in this country].”

• **New York City’s tap water is among the purest in the nation, yet Nestlé opened up an entire store — Pure Life Mercado del Agua (“water store”) — in the Bronx.**
  • The Bronx is one of the lowest-income areas of New York City, and over half of the population is Latino and a third is African American.
Federal oversight of bottled water quality is weaker than for tap water

- The FDA regulates bottled water as a “food” under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, whereas the EPA regulates tap water under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

- The GAO found that, “… FDA generally accords bottled water a low priority.”

- In fact, federal law does not give the FDA the authority to oversee state regulation of bottled water, but it requires the EPA to oversee state regulation of tap water.
FDA only regulates bottled water sold across state lines which leaves out the 60-70% of water bottled and sold within a single state.

For the 30-40% of bottled water that FDA does regulate it requires bottlers to test their source water once a week for microbiological contaminants, (unless the water comes from a municipal source, in which case it has to meet EPA testing requirements for tap water).

Bottlers must test their source water only once a year for chemical contaminants and once every four years for radiological contaminants.

Unlike public drinking water systems, which must keep water-testing records for five to 10 years, the FDA requires bottling facilities to keep test records for only two years.

The FDA inspects bottling plants irregularly, with some district offices only inspecting bottled water plants once every two or three years and other district offices inspecting them even less frequently.

States have enacted their own laws and regulations for bottled water, but those regulations and laws are less consistent and comprehensive than those for tap water.
Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974 with the purpose of protecting our public drinking water supplies.

Among its many provisions, the Safe Drinking Water Act enables the EPA to establish and enforce health standards for contaminants in public drinking water and mandates public notification of any violations and public distribution of annual quality reports.

Specifically, the EPA’s Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) establishes legal limits on the level of contaminants allowed in drinking water. MCLs are based on human health risks, current available technology and the affordability of that technology.
Bottled water is not safer or healthier than tap water.

In 2008, the Environmental Working Group investigated 10 major brands of bottled water and found numerous contaminants that can be harmful to human health, including:

- disinfection byproducts,
- caffeine,
- pharmaceuticals,
- heavy metals and minerals (e.g., arsenic and radioactive isotopes),
- fertilizer residue containing nitrate and ammonia,
- and other industrial chemicals such as solvents, plasticizers and propellants

In 2007 and 2008, researchers from the Medical College of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee set out to determine what types of drinking water sources contributed to acute diarrheal illness in children. They did not expect what they found:

- Children who drank primarily bottled water were more likely to get sick than children who drank primarily tap water that came from Lake Michigan.
- Tap water from Lake Michigan appeared to be cleaner and safer than bottled water.
- The researchers suggested that this might be due to contamination of bottled water
Increasingly, bottled water comes from the tap

- In the face of public opposition to groundwater extraction companies are turning to municipal tap water
- Companies that bottle water from municipal sources often pay less per gallon of water than households do.
- Taxpayers are subsidizing the sale of their tap water for private industry profit.
Yet, bottled water is thousands of times more expensive than tap water.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Tap Water</th>
<th>Regular-Grade Gasoline</th>
<th>Bottled Water (16.9 oz. PET Bottles)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Gallon</td>
<td>$0.004</td>
<td>$3.86</td>
<td>$9.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Gallons</td>
<td>$0.02</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Gallons</td>
<td>$0.08</td>
<td>$77.20</td>
<td>$189.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bottled water is nearly 2,400 times the price of tap water and almost three times the national average price for a gallon of regular grade gasoline.

**Table 2. Price Comparison of Tap Water, Bottled Water and Gasoline**

**Figure 7. Average Price of a Gallon of Tap Water, Regular-Grade Gasoline and Bottled Water**

When bottled water doesn’t come from the tap...

- Companies extract non-renewable groundwater sources, leaving less for everyone else, present and future.

- The extraction of water for bottling can cause local water shortages and reduce the availability of local supply, to the detriment of people and local ecosystems reliant on it.

  - For example, in Mecosta County, MI, Nestlé’s pumping plant caused water flows in surface waters to fall. In one water body, water levels plumped, leading to the development of mud-flats.
Bottled water is not only a waste of your money, it puts tons of waste into the planet as well.

Researchers (from the Pacific Institute) found:

- That the manufacture, production and transportation of bottled water is 1,100 to 2,000 times as energy intensive as the treatment and distribution of tap water.
- In 2007, U.S. bottled water consumption had an energy input equivalent of between 32 and 54 million barrels of oil.
- In the U.S., over the course of a year, that amount of energy could fuel between 1.2 to 2.1 million cars, averaging 1.6 million cars annually.
Bottled water trash is an expense to communities

- About 71 percent of PET plastic bottles are not recycled and end up in landfills, as litter or incinerated.

- This plastic bottle trash can cost local governments a lot of money because they have to pay tipping fees, which are charges applied to a given quantity of waste at a processing facility, like a landfill.
Bottled Water Impacts The Human Right to Water

• In the U.S. many communities have had no option but to go to court to try to protect their water from bottlers.

• Litigation between residents and bottled water companies has disrupted harmony in communities across the United States — from California, to Michigan, to Maine.

• These legal battles can be extremely expensive and time consuming, and water bottling schemes have torn towns apart.

“Water is of course the most important raw material we have today in the world. It’s a question of whether we should privatize the normal water supply for the population. And there are two different opinions on the matter. The one opinion, which I think is extreme, is represented by the NGOs, who bang on about declaring water a public right. That means that as a human being you should have a right to water. That’s an extreme solution.”

—Nestlé chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, during an interview for the 2005 documentary *We Feed the World.*
Bottled Water Impacts The Human Right to Water

• Notably, Nestlé’s pursuit of water extends to communities in low- and middle-income countries where people are less able to defend their right to water.

• Yet Nestlé’s bottling operations could be further exacerbating limited freshwater resources.

• The 2012 documentary Bottled Life revealed that a nearby Nestlé Pure Life plant was impacting drinking water in the small Pakistani community of Bhati Dilwan, linking the plant to the community’s dirty and declining drinking water.

• As Bottled Life describes, “...the village fountain water is nothing more than foul-smelling sludge.”

• A former village councilor said that bottling operations drained groundwater levels by hundreds of feet, and many children in the community have become sick from drinking the dirty water.
Take Back the Tap, Support the Human Right to Water

• Consumers should switch back from bottled to tap water and reclaim the clean and affordable resource that flows from our faucets — they should Take Back the Tap.

• But it will take national leadership to rebuild America’s crumbling water and sewer infrastructure. The federal government must create a Clean Water Trust Fund to generate the money necessary to maintain and improve drinking water and sewage systems.

• In addition to the federal government finding a sustainable, steady source of funding for public water systems, one of the first steps to making that happen is reversing the decline of water fountains in public areas—after all, water is a public resource.
Food & Water Watch works with campuses around the country to help students Take Back the Tap

- There have been many campus victories and successes taking back the tap [http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/take-back-the-tap/students/victories/](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/take-back-the-tap/students/victories/)

**Wisconsin**
- Marquette University is a Take Back The Tap campus
- University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, not a TBTT campus, but bans the sale of bottled water on campus

**But faith-based groups can play a special role in environmental and consumer rights movements** – here’s how you can start a faith-based movement to ditch the bottle:

- Talk about filling stations in newsletters, email alerts, newspapers
- Connect with other potentially interested groups (ex: Water Shield through Greenfaith.)
- Host a blind taste test – bottled water versus your filtered tap and see who can tell the difference, or who prefers filtered tap over bottled
- Use games and giveaways to promote reusable bottles – which can be an excellent promotional tool for organizations
- Host movie screenings for the public of water documentaries like *FLOW: For Love Of Water*
Refillable Water Stations

**Refillable water stations:** At universities or schools there may already be student money earmarked for sustainable projects.

But for other institutions or groups, such as faith-based organizations, grants may be an excellent source of funding.

Also, local companies that produce filling stations or retrofits may be willing to give free or discounted products in return for advertising or promotion – especially if their products will be displayed in a public setting where people will see them.

For more information on how to promote tap water see our guide: “How Your Organization Can Promote Tap Water”
Additional Take Back The Tap Resources

Food & Water Watch has an app, Tap Buddy, that can help you find and share locations of water fountains in your area.

• Connect with us/TBTT

• Pledge to Take Back The Tap

Need organizing ideas?
Contact TBTT Campus Coordinator:
• Katy Kiefer: kkiefer(at)fwwatch(dot)org

Need more locally oriented guidance?
Contact FWW Midwest Regional Director:
• Emily Carroll: ecarroll(at)fwwatch(dot)org
Thank you!

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