

# Five Reasons to Ban Bottled Water

In Canada, we are not immune to the growing threats of water scarcity. Twenty per cent of municipalities have faced shortages in recent years. Canada is a net exporter of bottled water, selling its ancient glacier waters all over the world mostly for the profit of the large foreign-owned, multi-national water companies. In *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*, Council of Canadians Chairperson Maude Barlow writes, "Most provinces charge these companies next to nothing to extract this water from springs and aquifers, and whole watersheds are now under threat from this practice." But people are fighting back. Questions are being asked in communities across Canada about the extensive and damaging water-taking practices of for-profit bottling companies and citizens are calling on municipal governments and school boards to stop selling bottled water. Now is a great time to join the fight.

**Here are five reasons to ban bottled water:**

## 1. Bottled water leads to water shortages.

According to the Earth Policy Institute, water shortages have been reported in the Great Lakes region near water bottling plants. In Guelph, Ontario, a citizen's coalition called the Wellington Water Watchers (WWW), which includes members of the Council of Canadians, has a campaign against Nestlé. Despite severe droughts, the corporation is withdrawing millions of litres of water every day from an underground aquifer. Manufacturing water bottles also requires huge amounts of water. It takes three to five litres of water to produce every one-litre plastic bottle.

The demand for bottled water is also contributing to the global water crisis. Water shortages caused by Coca Cola's groundwater draining in Plachimada, India have led thousands of people to demand the closure of the Coca Cola plant in their community. Medha Patkar, a social activist leading the battle in Plachimada recently told the media, "The bottling of water has really exploited our ground reserves [...] killed our aquifers, and [...] encroached

upon the people's rights to natural resources and the right to plan with those resources."

## 2. Bottled water contributes to climate change.

In an era when the world is dealing with the impacts of climate change, the bottled water industry requires massive amounts of fossil fuels to manufacture and transport their products. According to the Bow River Keeper, a citizens' group that protects the Bow River watershed in Alberta, one quarter of the 89 billion litres of bottled water consumed every year are bought outside of the country where they are produced. The transportation of the bottles produces large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. The Bow River Keeper estimates that "the manufacturing and transport of a one kilogram bottle of Fiji water consumes 26.88 kilograms of water (7.1 gallons), 0.849 kilograms of fossil fuel (one litre or 0.26 gal), and emits 562 grams of greenhouse gases (1.2 pounds)."



**UNBOTTLE IT!**

## 3. Our landfills cannot support bottled water.

Canadian municipalities are dealing with a waste management crisis and our landfills cannot support the amount of garbage generated by the bottled water industry. According to a recent Toronto Sun article, "as few as 50 per cent of the water bottles Torontonians consume everyday are actually being recycled. That means as many as 65 million empty plastic water bottles per year end up as garbage in a landfill waste site." In some communities the percentage of water bottles that end up in landfills can be as high as 80 per cent.

## 4. Bottled water is not safer.

In order to persuade people to spend 200-3,000 times what they spend on tap water, bottled water companies advertise their products as a "safer and healthier alternative." Nothing can be further from the truth. Bottled water is regulated as a food product under the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. As such, water bottling plants are inspected on average only once every three years, ac-





According to the Polaris Institute, an Ottawa-based research organization. Tap water regulation, on the other hand, is far more stringent. Municipal tap water is tested continuously – both during and after treatment.

### 5. Water is a human right.

In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution recognizing the human right to water and sanitation. The UN Human Rights Council has also passed resolutions outlining governments' obligations concerning the right to water and sanitation. This right is now enshrined in international law and all countries must ensure its implementation. After consistently denying that the human right to water and sanitation existed, in 2012, the Canadian government finally conceded that the human right to water not only exists, but that it is integral to the right to an adequate standard of living under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Water is a human right and should be guaranteed to all people regardless of their ability to pay.

The bottled water industry has worked hard to undermine our faith in public water. Canada has one of the best public drinking water systems in the world. The Council of Canadians has focused its efforts on fighting for a National Water Policy that would improve the public system, enshrine the human right to water in legislation, and ensure clean drinking water standards for all communities across the country.

### Take action!

Join the fight against bottled water. Make your community the next Blue Community in Canada! Book a meeting with your municipal councillor or mayor to request that they pass resolutions recognizing the human right to water, banning bottled water from municipal facilities and events, and promoting public water services. Find out more about the Blue Communities Project in the Blue Communities Guide at [www.canadians.org/bluecommunities](http://www.canadians.org/bluecommunities).

### Sources and further reading:

Barlow, Maude (2007) *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*. Toronto: Mclelland and Stewart.

Arnold, Emily and Larsen, Janet, *Bottled Water: Pouring Resources Down the Drain* [www.earth-policy.org/Updates/2006/Update51.htm](http://www.earth-policy.org/Updates/2006/Update51.htm)

Inside the bottle campaign: [www.insidethebottle.org](http://www.insidethebottle.org)

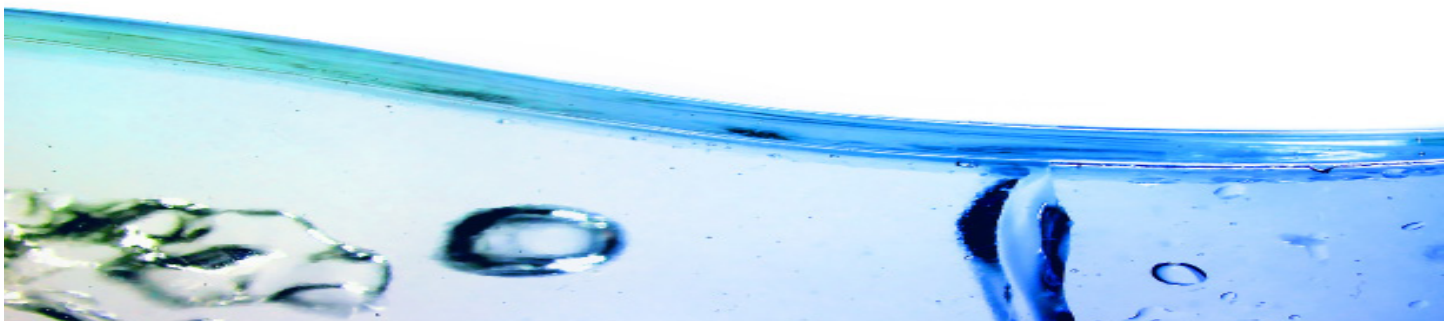
India Resource Centre: [www.indiaresource.org](http://www.indiaresource.org)

Think Outside the Bottle Campaign: [www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org](http://www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org)

Wellington Water Watchers: [www.wellingtonwaterwatchers.ca](http://www.wellingtonwaterwatchers.ca)

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