

Spinning the Bottle

Tackling industry spin on bottled water



The bottled water industry has worked hard to undermine our faith in public water despite the fact that Canada has one of the best public drinking water systems in the world. Communities across Canada are now questioning 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. Bottled water corporations are now investing in massive public relations campaigns to counter these community efforts. Here are our responses to some of the myths you will hear from the industry.

They say: The bottled water industry uses a very small percentage of groundwater in Canada.

We say: Arguments regarding the overall amount of groundwater extracted by the bottled water industry fail to acknowledge the environmental impacts on individual watersheds caused by removing large amounts of water. For example, in Aberfoyle Ontario, Nestlé's extraction of 3.6 million litres per day is causing a reversal of groundwater flow to the Mill Creek. The argument also fails to take into account the three to five litres of water required to produce a one-litre plastic bottle. It also fails to recognize the large amounts of water drawn from other sources such as ancient glaciers, lakes, streams and rivers for shipment elsewhere.

They say: The bottled water industry does not compete with public tap water.

We say: While Nestlé claims that "only 10 percent" of Canadian bottled water comes from municipal water systems, a much more significant portion was reported by the Canadian Bottled Water Association (CBWA). According to a 2007 *Maclean's* article, the

industry trade group claims "filtered tap water accounts for more than one-quarter of bottled water consumed by Canadians." Coca-Cola's Dasani brand is municipal water from Calgary, Alberta and Brampton, Ontario, and Pepsi's Aquafina water comes from Vancouver, British Columbia and Mississauga, Ontario. Even still, focusing specifically on municipal supplies obscures the fact that no matter where the water comes from, the bottling process still drains freshwater resources at a time when Environment Canada warns of a looming freshwater crisis, and 20 per cent of our municipalities have faced water shortages in recent years.



They say: If bottled water is not available, people will turn to less healthy alternatives.

We say: An increasing number of people are consciously choosing to avoid soft drinks. A recent study by the Euromonitor International reports a growing tendency for consumers, particularly baby boomers, to avoid carbonated beverages due to health concerns. They are not likely to turn to these beverages if bottled water becomes unavailable. Anyone looking for a drink can easily refill reusable bottles at taps or public fountains.

They say: Banning bottled water in public facilities violates one's freedom of choice.

We say: Given the choice, it makes sense that people would want to drink free, clean, safe drinking water rather than pay for a higher-priced version. We are fighting to ensure that people truly do have a choice by ensuring access to free municipal drinking water in public facilities. Bottled water should not be seen as a solution to poor access to water in schools and other public facilities. We collectively pay for municipal drinking water through our taxes





and should not have to purchase water that does not go through the same stringent testing as tap water in public places. Municipal governments also shouldn't use public funds to purchase bottled water for municipal staff or public functions.

They say: Bottled water contains less plastic than other products.

We say: It is clear that bottled water is harmful to the environment. According to the Earth Policy Institute, manufacturing the 29 billion plastic bottles used for water in the United States each year requires the equivalent of more than 17 million barrels of crude oil. Unlike tap water, bottled water is not produced locally, so energy is needed to pump, process, transport, and refrigerate the products. In the United States, the Pacific Institute estimates the annual fossil fuel footprint of bottled water consumption to be the equivalent of 50 million barrels of oil – enough to run 3 million cars for one year. Canada also imports a portion of the bottled water it consumes from other countries. According to Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, Canadian imports of bottled water increased from \$25.6 million in 1996 to \$75 million in 2007. Drinking tap water is the only sure way to protect the environment.

They say: Ninety-seven per cent of Canadians have access to recycling programs.

We say: Anyone concerned with the environment knows that reducing and reusing are far more important than recycling. Bottled water bans are the outcome of a growing movement of people who are refusing to buy plastic packaging in the first place. Secondly, having access to recycling and actually recycling are not the same thing. According to a 2008 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." While statistics vary from community to community, rejecting bottled water is the only way to truly eliminate impacts on our landfills and the environment.

They say: Why focus on bottled water instead of soft drinks, juice and other beverages?

We say: The issue isn't simply about packaging. Banning the sale and purchase of bottled water in public facilities is a way to

reclaim the water commons. By challenging the bottled water industry, we are resisting the corporate takeover of a shared public resource. The Council of Canadians has focused its efforts on fighting for a national water policy that would improve the public system and ensure clean drinking water standards for all communities across the country. Water is a human right and should be guaranteed to all people regardless of their ability to pay.

Take action!

Join the fight against bottled water. Visit www.canadians.org or call us at 1-800-387-7177 to find out how you can get a bottled water ban in your municipality or at your school board.

Join the Council of Canadians

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