

GET OFF THE BOTTLE !!

By Pam Benson, Montrose
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When you next reach for that package of bottled water at the grocery store, think twice about it. Not just twice, think three times about it. Your decision has long term ramifications – not just to your own health and well being, but also to the health of the planet and the well being of the human race. Truly, such a seemingly small decision *can* have huge consequences. Why? “Why is it wrong to buy and drink bottled water? Isn’t it healthier and better tasting?” you might argue. “I recycle my bottle so how bad can it be?” “How can my choice of bottled water be harmful to others?”

Probably the first reason you might grab a bottle of water, that is your desire to have clean and tasty water, is the first reason why you shouldn’t.

- Bisphenol A (AKA “bPA”) is a ubiquitous organic compound used in most plastics, especially water bottles, plastic cups, linings of cans and until most recently, baby bottles and sippy cups. Several studies have shown that it mimics estrogen and binds to the same receptors and thus may promote human breast cancer cell growth. BPA leaches from plastics especially when exposed to high temperatures or “hard use”. Boiling water and hot liquids can make bPA leach out 55x faster. There are studies on each side of the debate, some concluding that there is no cause for concern, others finding that there is enough evidence to look harder at the risk. The bottom line: experts are split. Since 1997, Japan has ceased using bPA and only uses natural resins. Health Canada in 2008 assessed that the chemical imposes “some risk to infants” and proposed classifying it as “toxic to human health and the environment”. On March 29, 2010 the EPA finally declared bPA a “chemical of concern”. You decide.
- Despite what the flashy ads would have you believe, bottled water is hardly superior. The FDA is responsible for bottled water safety, but the FDA rules do not apply to waters packaged and sold within the same state, nor to carbonated water. Even when covered by the FDA regs, bottled water is subject to *less vigorous* testing and the purity standards are lower than they are for tap! Bottled water standards allow for some contamination by E.Coli, contrary to tap water standards. Giardia and other parasites are also not tested for under FDA rules for bottled water. It is therefore possible that those with lowered immune systems, or the frail elderly and infants, should not be exposed to bottled water. (See the NRDC 1999 Bottled Water Report in which one third of 103 tested brands were contaminated). According to a 2000 WHO fact sheet, some substances may be harder to regulate in bottled water than tap, due to storage for long periods at sometimes higher temperatures: “Some micro-organisms, which are normally of little or no public health significance, may grow to higher levels in bottled waters” Tap water, please.

So what about the planetary issue? Where to begin! The manufacture of plastic bottles involves petroleum – that is 15 million barrels per year, or enough to fuel 100,000 cars for one year according to the Earth Policy Institute. Petroleum and energy are involved all along the path from the mining of the water, to the bottler, to the distributor, to your local store. According to Beverage Marketing Corp. statistics, one person uses 166 disposable plastic water bottles per year. That’s a lot of oil. In fact, that’s 44 million barrels per year to transport and refrigerate water that may be of lower quality than you can get from your own faucet.

What happens when you are finished with your water? The problems are only beginning. Only 2 out of 10 water bottles are recycled according to the Container Recycling Institute. The numbers are staggering: 50 *billion* beverage cans and bottles per year are dumped in our rapidly diminishing landfills. There, they leach methane into the atmosphere as they decompose over 450 years. Then there are those bottles that never make it to be recycled or to the dump. We will see plastic bottles on our roads, beaches, trails and waterways for the rest of our lives. And we, as taxpayers will pay for the clean up, forever.

Lastly, there is the global issue of water privatization. In both undeveloped and developed countries, we need to ask ourselves if our human society should allow water to be exploited for profit. We are part of a world in which 1 BILLION people worldwide lack access to safe and clean drinking water. Three thousand children a day die from diseases caught from tainted water. How is drinking a bottle of water going to change that? Excessive “mining” of water and then reselling it to locals and people thousands of miles away is madness. From Australia to Bolivia to Salida, Colorado, communities are being forced to defend their own water sources from international corporations whose sole motive is profit. We can change the market by changing the demand.

When you reach for that package of bottled water, think outside the bottle.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED:

Books:

- “Blue Gold: The Battle Against Corporate Theft of the World’s Water” by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke.
- “Thirst, Fighting the Corporate Theft of Our Water” by Alan Snitow, Deborah Kaufman, M. Fox.
- “Unquenchable: America’s Water Crisis & What to do about it” by Robert Glennon.

Films:

- “FLOW: For the Love of Water”
- “Tapped”
- “Blue Gold: World Water Wars”

