

# TAP WATER VS. BOTTLED WATER

## *What will you drink?*

### COST

Bottlers take water, a natural resource that should belong to everyone, put it in little plastic bottles, and sell it back to us for hundreds (sometimes thousands) of times the cost of tap water.

**TAP WATER** costs just **a fraction of a penny per gallon**.

**BOTTLED WATER** costs between **\$3.00 and \$14.00 per gallon** when purchased in small, single serving bottles.

The *cost of gasoline* is between \$2.50 and \$3.50 per gallon.

The *cost of milk* is between \$2.79 and \$4.79 per gallon.

### SAFETY AND REGULATION

Both bottled water and municipal tap water are generally safe to drink. In fact, 25 - 40% of bottled water is actually tap water. However, tap water is more strictly regulated than bottled water.

**TAP WATER** in the U.S. is regulated by the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**. Standards are strict, testing is frequent and your local water company must make information available to you in its annual Water Quality Report.

**BOTTLED WATER** sold in the U. S. is regulated by the **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**. However, the FDA exempts water that is bottled and sold in the same state. The International Bottled Water Association also sets voluntary standards for its members. No information about quality is made public. No testing by any entity is required after bottled water leaves the processing plant, no matter how long it sits on retail shelves.

## KEY DIFFERENCES

### *Between EPA Tap Water Regulations and FDA Bottled Water Regulations*

#### **Disinfection required?**

Big City<sup>1</sup> Tap Water: YES      Small Town<sup>2</sup> Tap Water: IF NEEDED  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Confirmed *E. coli* and fecal coliform banned?**

Big City Tap Water: YES      Small Town Tap Water: YES  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Must filter out pathogens or have strictly protected source?**

Big City Tap Water: YES      Small Town Tap Water: NO<sup>3</sup>  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Must test for *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, and viruses?**

Big City Tap Water: YES      Small Town Tap Water: NO  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Testing frequency for most synthetic organic chemicals?**

Big City Tap Water: Once a quarter<sup>4</sup>      Small Town Tap Water: Once a quarter<sup>4</sup>  
Bottled Water: Once a year

#### **Operator must be trained and certified?**

Big City Tap Water: YES      Small Town Tap Water: YES  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Must test for and meet standards for asbestos and phthalate?**

Big City Tap Water: YES<sup>4</sup>      Small Town Tap Water: YES<sup>4</sup>  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Must use certified labs for testing?**

Big City Tap Water: YES      Small Town Tap Water: YES  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Must report violations to state, feds?**

Big City Tap Water: YES      Small Town Tap Water: YES  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Consumer right to know about contamination?**

Big City Tap Water: YES      Small Town Tap Water: YES  
Bottled Water: NO

#### **Testing frequency for bacteria?**

Big City Tap Water: 100s of times per month      Small Town Tap Water: 20 times per month  
Bottled Water: Once a week

<sup>1</sup> Big city using surface source (*applies throughout*)

<sup>2</sup> Small town using well water (*applies throughout*)

<sup>3</sup> Unless subject to surface contamination

<sup>4</sup> Waivers available if clean source

## WHAT'S THE IMPACT ON THE EARTH?

### TAP WATER

- It comes from wells and surface water near your home and runs through an **existing infrastructure** of pumps, treatment plants and pipes right to your tap.

### BOTTLED WATER

- It's packaged in small **plastic bottles made of natural gas and petroleum**. In 2006 the manufacture of bottles for water (*to meet only the U.S. demand*) required **17 million barrels of oil** (*enough to fuel 1,000,000 cars for a year*).
- Then it **travels** in those plastic bottles by truck and/or boat (*from as near as a local tap or as far away as Fiji*) **using fossil fuel and emitting CO<sub>2</sub>** until it reaches a retail outlet near you.
- **Only 15 - 23% of those bottles are recycled**. The other **77 - 85% end up in the waste stream**. (*Jeff Theerman, Executive Director of the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD), identifies plastic bottles as the single largest contributor to sewer blockage and backup problems in the area.*)
- Even if a bottle is recycled it must travel, using fossil fuel and emitting CO<sub>2</sub>, to a pickup point and then to a recycling plant. **Approximately 50% of the plastic bottles recycled in the U.S. travel all the way to China** to be processed into reusable material and shipped back to the U.S.

## WHAT TO DO?

**CARRY YOUR OWN TAP WATER IN A REUSABLE WATER BOTTLE.** Ideally, that bottle would be made of **glass or stainless steel**. The impracticality of glass bottles when hiking, biking, etc. and the relatively high cost of stainless steel bottles (\$14.00 or so) make it likely that you will choose plastic for your reusable water bottle.

### WHICH KIND OF PLASTIC IS SAFEST?

#1 and #2 plastics are intended for single use only.

#3 plastic is unsafe.

**#4 and #5 are the safest plastics for reusable water bottles, #5 being best.**

#6 plastic is unsafe.

#7 plastic has recently been discovered to release a hormone-mimicking chemical, especially when exposed to heat. (This plastic is used in some baby bottles and is unsafe for that use. Glass is safest for baby bottles.)

***NO PLASTIC SHOULD BE USED FOR PROLONGED STORAGE OR EXPOSED TO EXTREME HEAT.***

## IF YOU QUESTION THE SAFETY OF YOUR WATER!

Especially if you live in a relatively poor, rural area or in an old house that still has some lead pipes, or if someone in your family has a compromised immune system, you may want to call your local water company and ask them for a referral to someone who can test your water right at the tap. There are inexpensive filters available that will correct all common problems at the tap.

There is not much point in testing the bottled water you drink, because the next bottle may come from a different source, have been treated differently, and/or have spent longer in a plastic bottle on the shelf.

## WHO OWNS OUR WATER?

**WATER** is a natural resource necessary to sustain life and, just like air, it should belong to everyone. Water should remain a public, not a private, resource. Through our government we pump, treat, regulate and supply water to everyone at a very nominal cost (a fraction of a penny per gallon).

**BOTTLERS** take that same water, pumping it from our aquifers, springs, streams and wetlands, and sell it back to us at exorbitant prices.

**Water must not be privatized, it belongs to us all.**

*This brochure has been produced by the Environment Focus Group  
of Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice.*

*For more information go to our web site: [www.womensvoicesraised.org](http://www.womensvoicesraised.org)*

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