

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 launched a campaign against Nestle. The corporation's water-taking of 3.6 million litres per day is causing a reversal of groundwater flow to the Mill Creek.

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 right 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 citizen's 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).”

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 3 years, 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.

Around the world, there is a growing citizens’ movement working to establish a global “right to water,” affirming that water is an essential and irreplaceable resource for people’s health and for our planet as a whole. The Canadian government has been blocking recognition of the human right to water — an issue that affects billions of people who live without access to safe, clean water. Canada first took this position in 2002 in a vote at the Human Rights Commission. In March our country confirmed its stance at the new Human Rights Council by leading the efforts to gut a resolution on the right to water. 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. Instead of high-priced bottled water, we need to work towards a National Water Policy that would improve the public water 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. Visit www.unbottleit.org to find out how you can get a bottled water ban in your municipality or at your school board.



Sources and further reading

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

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

Inside the Bottle campaign: www.insidethebottle.org

India Resource Centre: www.indiaresource.org

Think Outside the Bottle campaign: www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org

Wellington Water Watchers: www.wellingtonwaterwatchers.ca

Join the Council of Canadians

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