

Bottled Water's Shocking Impacts and the Growing Opposition

AlterNet, August 5, 2008

By AlterNet Staff

Editor's Note: We've been following the rising grassroots movement against the bottled water industry. And it looks like the hard work is paying off. According to one group working on the issue, "In May, Nestle reported that its bottled water profits had dropped, acknowledging 'criticism of bottled water' as a factor in decreased sales. According to Beverage Marketing Corporation, last year the U.S. bottled water industry experienced its slowest annual revenue growth in more than 15 years." Below you'll find two stories that show what's going on in the fight against bottled water.

Tap Has 1/100 the Impact of Bottled Water by Graham Hill, Huffington Post
We have forgotten about our closest source of water at home -- the tap. Yet one of the simplest ways to reduce our environmental impact, to save money (not a ton...yet!) and to free ourselves from shopping and storage hassle, is by saying goodbye to bottled water. A [life cycle assessment](#) commissioned by the Swiss Gas and Water Association traced the entire life cycle from water extraction to serving it up in a glass.

Their findings showed that tap water has less than one percent of the impacts of un-refrigerated bottled water. Even when the tap water is refrigerated its impact is only one quarter of that of bottled water. These astonishing figures show that tap water is hands-down the greenest and most responsible choice.

The biggest impacts for bottled water come from the refrigeration, packaging and transport. [Refrigeration](#) also substantially increased the impacts of the tap water scenarios thanks to the energy consumed to power the fridge. Returnable bottles and jugs had lesser overall impacts when the distances for their transport were short. But as the distances increase, the higher weight glass bottles resulted in an "on the whole" higher environmental impact as compared to the PET bottles. This reminds us that transportation plays a big role in the impacts of bottled water, more so than even packaging in this case. The origin of the water causes the biggest impact and so the distance between the bottling site and you must be as short as possible to reduce impacts -- this is a pretty hard factor to control as a consumer. Hear that [Fiji](#)? When that distance is short, then returnable bottles become a viable alternative. As the distance gets bigger, the returnables cause more impact because of their higher weight.

Packaging (something tap water has none of) is also a problem when you look at the environmental impacts of bottled water. The [Earth Policy Institute](#) tells us that 17 million barrels of oil are used annually to meet American demand for bottled water. That's enough to fuel more than 1 million U.S. cars per year. Almost 2.7

million tons of plastic are used worldwide to bottle water each year while 90% of those end up in landfills. And to think that for the most part, we don't even need bottled water at all.

That's an enormous [amount of waste](#) for water that has no real added health benefits. If you do choose to hydrate yourself via the bottled stuff you will be causing almost 100 times more impact than if you fill your cup from the tap. Not all tap water tastes the same, but the truth is that tap water is actually [more strictly controlled](#) by the Environmental Protection Agency than bottled water is by the Food and Drug Administration. If you really can't stand the tap try a [filtered jug](#) at home or a filter for your faucet.

Convinced yet?

Here's the second piece.

Attorney General Slams Nestle's Bottled Water Aspirations by Tara Lohan, AlterNet

As many of you already know, we've been covering the situation in [McCloud, California](#) where food and beverage giant Nestle is trying to build a massive water bottling plant there -- much to the dismay of the majority of local residents. Now Nestle has got even more opposition.

Earlier this week, Attorney General Edmund G. Brown Jr. warned Nestle that "California will challenge the environmental plan for a bottled water plant in Siskiyou county if the company does not revise its contract to pump water from the McCloud River."

Here's what a statement from the AG's office said:

"It takes massive quantities of oil to produce plastic water bottles and to ship them in diesel trucks across the United States," Attorney General Brown said. "Nestle will face swift legal challenge if it does not fully evaluate the environmental impact of diverting millions of gallons of spring water from the McCloud River into billions of plastic water bottles," Brown added.

Although Nestle publicly offered to reduce its annual water take to 195 million gallons of spring water per year -- enough to fill 3.1 billion 8-ounce plastic bottles -- the company has not yet agreed to change the terms of its contract with the McCloud Community Service District. The current fifty-year contract permits the company to draw 520 million gallons of spring water each year and also to pump unlimited amounts groundwater.

...Brown also said the environmental analysis fails to consider the global warming impacts of producing and transporting millions of gallons of water including: greenhouse gases from producing the plastic bottles; electrical demand for the project; and the diesel soot and greenhouse gas emissions from truck trips.

Attorney General Brown has asked the County of Siskiyou to revise its environmental impact report and circulate a new draft of the environmental impact report.

This is just the latest in a round of setbacks for Nestle, which announced recently that it would [scale down the size of the plant](#).

The pressure groups who have been fighting Nestle on the issue had many accolades for the AG, as expected.

One of the main groups involved in the issue, [Food and Water Watch](#), applauded Brown's announcement and added, "In the worst cases, Nestle's water grab ruins streams, ponds, wells and aquifers. And in all=2 0cases, Nestle's practices raise serious questions about who should be allowed to control water, our most essential resource, and to what end. Will corporations like Nestle or the communities that rely upon this most essential resource for their health, livelihood and well-being control water resources?"

Stay tuned as we continue to cover McCloud's fight against Nestle.