

It may be important to think about more than just getting a drink when you pick up a bottle of water. This article discusses some of the problems that bottled water causes. Read the article and answer the questions that follow.

All Bottled Up

by Jodie Mangor

1 **V**oss and Imsdal come from Norway, Bisleri is bottled in India, and Vata is an Iranian brand. Around the globe, people are quenching their thirst with bottled water. In the past 10 years, sales in Asia and South America have tripled. In 2007, people in the United States drank more than 8 billion gallons of bottled water. The United States currently consumes the most bottled water in the world, followed by Mexico, China, and Brazil. Compared to sugary, caffeinated soft drinks, this seems a healthy choice. But is it a wise one?

Water for One

2 A single-serve water bottle offers great convenience. It can be bought almost anywhere, carried around for a while, and then thrown away.

3 The impact of bottled water on the environment, however, is staggering. Approximately 2.7 million tons of plastic are turned into disposable bottles each year. This requires large quantities of crude oil and water. It also produces greenhouse gases. Bottled water is often shipped long distances to reach consumers, sometimes transcontinentally.



This uses even more fossil fuels and creates more pollution.

4 Although the bottles can be recycled, only a fraction of them are. The United States only recycles about 23 percent. The rest are part of a growing solid waste problem.

Bottled Over Tap?

5 Convenience isn't the only reason for bottled water's rise in popularity. Words like "pristine" and "pure," together with images of mountains or glaciers, are used to market bottled water. Many people believe that it must be cleaner

and more healthful than tap water¹ from public water systems. But this is a misconception. In developed nations such as the United States and in Europe, regulations that ensure safe water are often stricter for tap than for bottled water. In the United States, tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Bottled water, which is viewed as a packaged food product, is regulated by individual states if it stays within their borders or by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) if it crosses state lines.

6 Jermuk water, which is bottled in Armenia, provides an example of how bottled water standards vary from place to place. In 2007, Jermuk water was pulled from American shelves by the FDA because it contained arsenic² levels as high as 674 micrograms per liter. Armenian standards allow as much as 700 micrograms of arsenic per liter of water, but U.S. standards set the limit at 10 micrograms per liter.

7 It may come as a surprise that as much as 40 percent of the water bottled in the United States starts out as tap water. Before bottling, some companies filter it, and they might add minerals for taste.

8 Despite its sometimes humble origins, bottled water can cost anywhere from 240 to 10,000 times more per gallon than tap water.

Is the Bottle Ever Better?

9 At times, bottled water is the best available option. Hurricanes, other natural disasters, and emergency situations such

as the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center in 2001 can negatively affect the safety of public water. Reliable water systems may not be in place in developing nations and war-torn countries. In these cases, bottled water can provide an important source of clean, safe, drinking water.

Future Solutions

10 “Back to the tap” movements are cropping up around the world. In order to save money, use fewer resources, and create less waste, they advocate using tap water and reusable “sports” bottles rather than bottled water. San Francisco and other cities across the United States no longer allow their governmental departments to buy single-serve water bottles. Cities in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom are considering similar bans.

11 Many bottled water companies are trying to do their part, too. They have reduced the amount of plastic in their bottles and bottle caps. Both the Colorado-based BIOTA company and the English company Belu Water use biodegradable plastic bottles derived from corn. Belu takes it a step further by donating some of its profits to clean water projects.

12 Bottled water has become an international phenomenon.³ While it is an important source of safe drinking water, we should not lose sight of a more environmentally friendly source: the water that comes out of our taps.

¹ *tap water* — water drawn from a faucet

² *arsenic* — a poisonous chemical

³ *phenomenon* — any observable fact or event; fad