

August 13, 2008

Mayor and Members of Council  
City of London  
300 Dufferin Avenue  
London, ON N6A 4L9

Dear Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco-Best and All Members of Council,

On behalf of the Council of Canadians, I would like to commend you for considering a staged phase out of bottled water from City-operated facilities. The environmental and social costs of bottled water are enormous, which is clearly recognized in the resolution passed by the City's environment and transportation committee last week. The proposed measures will make a huge difference in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, eliminating waste from our crowded landfills, and in making London an environmental leader in Canada.

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. According to the Bow River Keeper, a citizens' group aimed at protecting the Bow River watershed, a quarter of the 89 billion litres of bottled water consumed every year is consumed outside the country of its origin. Hence the transportation of bottled water also produces large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. The Bow River Keeper estimates that "the manufacturing and transport of 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)."

Bottled water also creates excessive amounts of physical waste when Ontario is dealing with a waste management crisis. 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." As the resolution before you on bottled water makes clear, the situation in London is not much different, with 40 per cent of plastic bottles ending up in landfills or littered in London's streets and parks.

This waste is all the more unnecessary when we consider, as the environment and transportation committee has done, that the City's water quality standards exceed those of the bottled water industry, which is gouging consumers for a product that is readily available at a tiny cost from everyone's taps – and at a time of growing water scarcity, even here in Canada.

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Twenty per cent of Canadian municipalities have faced water shortages in recent years. And yet Canada is a net exporter of bottled water, selling its ancient glacier waters all over the world mostly for the profit of the foreign-owned, big four water companies. 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.

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 Nestlé. The corporation's water taking on 3.6 million litres per day is causing a reversal of groundwater flow to the Mill Creek. In April 2008, the Ontario government renewed Nestlé's permit for a period of two years. The WWW is hoping that by the time the permit expires, there will no longer be a demand for bottled water outside of emergency use.

That demand for bottled water is not natural but has been carefully fostered by an industry that works hard to undermine our faith in public water. Nestlé, for instance, markets Aquapod, which is shaped like a rocket and aimed at the six-to-twelve-year-old market and whose slogan is 'A blast of fun.' Ads for the product have hit DC Comic books, Nickelodeon and children's television shows. Nestlé spokesperson, John Challinor's claim last week that citizens will turn to less healthful beverages is ludicrous if they can't buy bottled water is ludicrous. In reality, corporations like Nestlé have turned water into a commodity precisely because North Americans are turning away from their other unhealthy products.

The Council of Canadians sees municipal bottled water bans as an incentive to improve access to public drinking water in Canadian communities and calls on the federal government to complement these bans, like the one being proposed in London, with a national water policy that establishes national drinking water standards, improves funding to municipalities, protects groundwater sources and bans bulk water exports. We commend the city for considering a phase out of bottled water in City facilities and encourage you to pass the resolution as presented by the environment and transportation committee.

Sincerely,



Maude Barlow  
National Chairperson  
The Council of Canadians