

## Single Use Bottled Water – Why Recycling Is Not the Answer

Recycling enormous amounts of plastic water bottles is not 'green'. Yes – it is better than going to the landfill – but no – it is not 'green' by any stretch of the imagination. Bottled water contributes to vast amounts of pollution and climate change. In an era when the world is dealing with the impacts of climate change, the bottled water industry requires massive amounts of precious and dwindling fossil fuels to manufacture. The manufacturing of bottled water creates massive amounts of CO2 emissions and places great strains on aquifers. Aquifers and whole water sheds are under sever threat due to this practice. All of this in the midst of an alarming global water crisis. In India, whole river systems, such as the River Bhavani in Tamil Nadu state, have been sold to Coca-Cola even as the state is suffering the worst drought in living memory. As one company explains, water is now a "rationed necessity that may be taken by force".

From its extraction through sale, use and disposal, bottled water has dire consequences on our lives, our health, our environment, and those most vulnerable - yet most of this is carefully hidden from view by way of careful branding and deceptive greenwashing practices.

The bottled water industry is growing at an annual rate of 20%. Last year, nearly 100 billion litres of bottled water were sold around the world, most of it in non-renewable plastic. A close look at the myths about recycling shows they are being perpetrated less by those committed to ecology and more by those doing the most damage to the planet.

Plastics recycling only minimally reduce the amount of virgin resources used to make plastics. Recycled plastic is a small percentage of what is manufactured and the amount is actually decreasing. Even those active in administering recycling programs have come to recognize, for instance, that plastics consumption is actually encouraged by recycling.

**The notion, that recycling is the answer produces only more illusions, not environmental sustainability.** Outrageous levels of production and consumption are at the core of market economies, and unless that process is confronted, little will change. Businesses and leaders have an opportunity and a responsibility to model leadership and embrace this much needed positive change. The bottom line is that there is no need for bottled water to be sold in a facility that provides us adequate access to municipal drinking water. Bottled water is a habit that undermines the safety of tap water and commodifies a natural resource that's a public commons. We must challenge the idea of convenience and make a commitment. As responsible global citizens we must work towards a zero waste, sustainable culture for the future of our planet and for future generations. Our children deserve nothing less.

**70 million bottles** of water are sold in the U.S. every day.

**38 billion** single-use water bottles end up in U.S. landfills and waterways leaching toxins into our earth and water every year.

Bottled water production, transportation and disposal required more than **17 million barrels** of oil last year in America alone, enough fuel to power more than 1 million cars for a year, generating more than 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide.

**9 billion gallons** of bottled water is consumed each year in the U.S.

The amount of fuel required to transport water bottles in the U.S. alone is equivalent to **38,000, eighteen-wheel wheel trucks** delivering water weekly.

Over **2.5 billion tons of plastic** are used to produce single-use water bottles every year. This results in over 1.5 million tons of plastic waste – requiring 47 million gallons of oil every year.

Bottled water companies, water to production ratios are roughly 3 to 1; for every 3 liters of freshwater that the bottled water industry takes from the earth only 1 liter of bottled water is actually produced.

Although two-thirds of the Earth is water, only 2% is drinkable freshwater. However, 1.6% of the total 2% is locked up in polar ice-caps. According to the United Nations 17 years from now, **by 2025, over two-thirds of our world's population will not have enough water to sustain the basics of life.**

More about recycling:

Although all plastic containers bear the chasing arrows symbol with a number in the middle, suggesting that all such products are recyclable, it is only 1s and 2s that can be. There is no market for bottles numbered 3 through 7. Most of the products which are manufactured from what is recycled, cannot be recycled a second time. Therefore, what you set out at your curb is only one generation away from a landfill. Recycling PET is similar to the polyethylenes. Bottles may be color sorted and are ground up and washed. Unlike polyethylene, PET sinks in the wash water while the plastic caps and labels are floated off. The clean flake is dried and often repelletized. PVC bottles are hard to tell apart from PET bottles, but one stray PVC bottle in a melt of 10,000 PET bottles can ruin the entire batch.

Equipment to sort plastics is being developed, but currently most recyclers are still sorting plastics by hand (by the impoverished and exploited in developing countries) which is hard and ugly work. It is also expensive and time consuming. Plastics also are bulky and cumbersome to collect. In short, they take up a lot of space in recycling trucks. Although in theory all plastic is recyclable, market forces, transportation costs and handling constraints often make recycling plastic prohibitively expensive. This is a tax burden being unfairly being placed upon the citizens of municipalities.

Currently only about 3.5% of all plastics generated is recycled, compared to 34% of paper, 22% of glass and 30% of metals. At this time, plastics recycling only minimally reduce the amount of virgin resources used to make plastics. Recycling papers, glass and metal, materials that are easily recycled more than once, saves far more energy and resources than are saved with plastics recycling. The recycling rate for all PET (polyethylene terephthalate) bottles, which represent 44 percent of total plastic bottle production, dropped to 25 percent. PET soda bottles, which represent one fourth of all plastic bottles produced, and nearly two thirds of all PET bottles, dropped to 36 percent last year. Plastic bottle recycling has not kept pace with the dramatic increases in virgin resin PET sales, particularly for PET bottles. Most of the increase in

virgin resin sales has been for single-serve PET soda bottles (under 24 oz) that now make up 60 percent of soda bottle market share.

When glass, paper and cans are recycled, they become similar products which (theoretically) can be used and recycled over and over again. With plastics recycling, however, there is usually only a single re-use. Some soda bottles make it to a recycler who must scramble to find a buyer, and often ends up selling the bottles at a loss to an entrepreneur who makes carpeting or traffic strips, anything but new bottles. And what is the plastic bottling industry doing to create a stronger recycling market for its product? Nothing.

Precycling' Catches On With Consumers:

Among the early-adopter segment of eco-conscious consumers, The Intelligence Group has observed a new trend called "precycling" and believes it will grow.

Consumers who precycle aren't just content with throwing cans and bottles in the recycle bin and letting waste management sort it out. With increasing consumer interest in sustainable living, those engaged in precycling aim to avoid products that create more superfluous stuff. This could mean everything from buying bulk in order to avoid excess packaging to reusing everything from water bottles to shopping bags (the latter of which has caught on with retailers and the public at large).

In its May *Cassandra Report*, The Intelligence Group found that 45% of trendsetters and 14% of mainstream consumers have "cut down on bottled water purchases" in the past six months, while 49% and 16% respectively have "cut down on use of plastic bags" during the same period.

Precycling evolved out of a trend the market research and consulting firm spotted in 2007, which it called "wasted." This is when it noticed excess was emerging as a dirty word. People were looking for ways to pare down packaging and/or repurpose it, for starters. As examples, think Pom Wonderful's reusable glassware and Chaco footwear's program that offers customers a 20% discount when they send in used but clean shoes, which are donated to developing countries.

It is becoming a more popular viewpoint that recycling cans, bottles, paper and such is an antiquated misuse of energy, so precyclers remove themselves from junk mail lists, read paper-based media online and even carry around "precycling kits" consisting of cloth napkins and silverware—anything to reduce waste and not contribute to the recycling bin.

"It's not just about how you dispose of [products and packaging] anymore," said Melissa Lavigne, director of marketing for The Intelligence Group, which is a division of CAA. "It's about being conscious about products you buy in the first place. That's the idea behind precycling."

Of course, precycling isn't replacing recycling completely, especially in its more abstract forms. Consumers are all for donating or reselling their electronic gadgets, for instance, thanks to eBay and other Web resources. Lavigne said, "We asked people how many think of the resale value when they purchase a product, and 49% said they do."

Many state that the solution is to ensure maximum recycling of the single use water bottles. The true solution is to not produce them in the first place. Since the beginning of life on earth as we know it – human life has been sustained with no dependence on bottled water. In fact, bottled water is the single biggest scam ever put over on the public on an enormous global scale. Consider what Jeff Caso, a Nestle executive has to say about their bottled water products; “We sell water, so we have to be clever.”

Cory Morningstar

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