

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

Manufacturing water bottles also requires huge amounts of water. It takes three to five litres of water to produce every one-litre plastic bottle.

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 rights 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 citizens' 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)."



UNBOTTLE IT!

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 bot-





ling plants are inspected on average only once every three 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. The Council of Canadians has focused its efforts on fighting for a National Water Policy that would improve the public 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.canadians.org to find out how you can get a bottled water ban in your municipality or at your school board. For more information about the campaign, contact the Council of Canadians National Water Campaigner Meera Karunanathan at 613-233-4487, ext 234, or by e-mail at meera@canadians.org.

Sources and further reading:

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

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

The strength of the Council is in its membership. The Council does not accept funding from corporations or from governments, so membership donations are vital to our activities. We work with community groups, seniors, students, unions and other organizations across the country to promote progressive policies on public health care, fair trade, secure energy, clean water and other issues of social and economic concern to Canadians. Visit www.canadians.org or call us at 1-800-387-7177 to become a member today.



For more information about how to protect Canada's water, visit www.canadians.org or call us at 1-800-387-7177