

BOTTLING A PUBLIC SERVICE

For the vast majority of Canadians, excellent drinking water is as close as the nearest faucet or fountain. Municipal drinking water is safe, reliable and affordable.

But the bottled water industry sees this vital public service as its main competition. Multi-million dollar marketing campaigns seek to undermine public confidence in the tap with leaky claims that bottled water is safer or tastes better.

Yet the facts are clear: the bottled water industry is less regulated than public tap water, is more energy-intensive and more harmful to the environment.

Canadians aren't buying the bottled water sales job. Fewer of us are drinking bottled water, according to Statistics Canada. And a growing number of public bodies like municipalities, campuses and school boards are ending the sale of bottled water.

Join the growing **Back the Tap** movement to:

- challenge the bottled water industry
- reject the commodification of water – it is not something to be bought and sold for profit,
- promote safe, environmentally-sound municipal drinking water
- defend public water systems against privatisation,
- demand better funding to maintain and strengthen municipal water systems, and
- work to promote safe drinking water for all – including for the many First Nations communities that currently lack access.

You can help stop corporate control of water. Join the **Back the Tap** movement to end the sale and distribution of bottled water in public buildings and facilities, and promote access to public tap water.

NO WATER FOR PROFIT

Communities, not corporations, must control water resources and services. Canada's drinking water and sewage systems are community assets, and nearly all remain in public hands. In cities and towns from coast to coast to coast, the public sector meets high quality, safety and environmental standards, delivering affordable services on a non-profit basis.

Water is a commons. This means that it belongs to current and future generations, as well as the Earth and other species. Governments must manage water resources on our behalf as a public trust. They must ensure water is distributed fairly and responsibly.

Keeping the bottled water industry in check goes hand-in-hand with work to keep our drinking water systems public. Canadians trust municipalities and public sector workers – not private corporations – to manage and deliver drinking water.

Yet our cities and towns are under pressure to privatise, thanks to federal underfunding and an ongoing Conservative government push for so-called “public-private partnerships” (P3s).

P3s, contracting out and other forms of privatisation are risky for water. When corporations finance, manage or deliver water services for profit, costs rise and local control is lost. Equal access and quality are compromised. And international trade deals like the Canada-EU Comprehensive Trade Agreement expose water services to even greater privatisation threats.

Around the world, water service cutoffs and pre-paid water meters show the barriers water privatisation creates. Health can deteriorate and household tasks become more difficult – and poor people, women and people of colour are hardest hit.

The bottled water industry sees water as a commodity — privately owned, bought and sold for a profit. Cultivating consumers’ willingness to pay more for a litre of bottled water than for a litre of gas helps set the stage for the public acceptance of water privatisation. It’s time to say no to water for profit.

WATER: A HUMAN RIGHT

“Ensuring the rights to water and sanitation for all requires a paradigm shift towards new designs and approaches that promote human rights, that are affordable and that create more value in terms of public health improvements, community development, and global ecosystem protection.” –*Catarina de Albuquerque, United Nations special rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation*

Fresh water is essential to life and a precious, shared resource that is becoming increasingly scarce around the globe. As the crisis deepens, the needs of people and the planet must take priority.

Powerful transnational corporations motivated solely by profit must not make decisions about who gets water and at what price. The management of water should be left to democratic institutions whose only priority is to ensure access to water.

According to the United Nations, more than 880 million people worldwide lack access to clean, drinkable water. More than two million people die each year due to a lack of safe drinking water.

On July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly voted to recognise the right to water and sanitation as basic human rights. In September 2010, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a similar resolution and a year later passed a resolution further outlining what is needed to fully implement these rights. In doing so, the UN affirms that every person has the right to safe, clean, and affordable water. These resolutions require countries to provide the right to water for all people within their borders without discrimination.

The commodification of water stands in stark contrast to this recognition. As people become accustomed to paying handsomely for the water they drink, support for affordable and accessible public water systems will erode, moving us towards a world where access to clean drinkable water is dependent on your ability to pay.

Bottled water is not a long-term solution to inadequate or non-existent drinking water systems in the global South and in First Nations communities. Instead, we must press governments to fund the development of safe, affordable community-controlled water systems that deliver this human right to all.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

The lifecycle of a plastic water bottle creates significant amounts of greenhouse gases –which lead to climate change – and produces waste that ends up in landfills.

The three stages in this lifecycle are production, transportation, and disposal.

Production:

Bottled water manufacturers are the end point of a supply chain made up of the world’s biggest polluters. Plastic’s raw materials are toxic chemicals derived from crude oil.

- It takes large amounts of energy — about 3.4 megajoules — to make a one-litre plastic water bottle, cap and packaging;
- Making plastic bottles for the 2 billion litres of bottled water consumed annually in Canada gobbles up approximately 3 million barrels of oil in energy production and transportation;
- It takes three litres of water to produce one litre of bottled water
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Transportation:

The bottled water industry needs fossil-fuel powered ships, planes and vehicles to transport raw materials to plants and finished products to sale, contributing to climate change.

Many bottled water brands travel half way around the world to get to your local store, creating significant greenhouse gas emissions. Fiji water and San Pellegrino from Italy are two examples.

By contrast, tap water remains within a watershed. On average it has to travel less than 10 kilometers to reach its destination.

Disposal:

While bottled water companies hide behind recycling programs, many plastic bottles never end up being recycled. For example, Stewardship Ontario reports that 44% of plastic bottles, approximately 30,906 tonnes — ended up in landfills in 2009.

Bottled water companies have spent millions of dollars lobbying against deposit programs which require the industry to assume some of the costs of recycling and help reduce the use of virgin plastic in new bottles.

Provinces with these programs have much higher recycling rates – 75%, compared to only 33% for jurisdictions without such programs.

Even if more bottles were being recycled, recycling is an energy-intensive activity with a much larger carbon footprint than the treatment and distribution of public tap water.

REGULATION OF WATER

In the vast majority of Canadian cities, tap water undergoes far more regular and strenuous testing than bottled water. While the bottled water industry would like Canadians to believe their product is the only water safe enough to consume, these claims are false.

In Canada, bottled water is regulated under the federal Food and Drugs Act, while the responsibility for making sure tap water is safe is a shared responsibility between the provincial, territorial, federal and municipal governments. Provinces and territories use the federal Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality to assess the quality of tap water, and municipalities usually oversee the day-to-day operations of the treatment facilities.

There is still a significant difference between Canadian drinking water guidelines and the bottled water regulations. Bottled water manufacturers are typically expected to ensure that chemical and radiological contaminants do not exceed the maximum acceptable concentrations, as set out in the drinking water guidelines. However, there is very little accountability to ensure that bottled water manufacturers do follow the guidelines. Tap water guidelines are more stringent and thorough than any regulations for bottled water.

Inspectors from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency visit a water bottling plant once in a 12 to 18 month period. In contrast, the City of Ottawa conducts over 125,000 tests on its drinking water each year, and the City of Toronto tests its water every four to six hours.

TIPS TO MAKE YOUR OWN SPACES AND EVENTS BOTTLED WATER-FREE

By promoting tap water and planning events challenging bottled water and water privatisation, you will help build a community that recognises the right to water. Events that engage your friends, family, colleagues, peers, politicians, and others encourage sustained changes in behavior and ongoing engagement in creating and supporting public water services.

- Provide water pitchers and glasses to speakers at events. If your school, church, workplace, or other space that you are using has a department of conference services, work with them to ensure they are providing tap water.
- Purchase reusable water jugs with pumps at your local hardware store and hook them up to the tap. Have volunteers on hand to refill them.
- As part of an ongoing campaign, lobby your school or workplace to end the sale and distribution of bottled water at events. Work with them to identify ways to provide public tap water.
- Some municipalities provide a free water tanker/trailer service for special events involving community members. Contact your local municipality's water department and find out if one is available. If they don't offer this service, suggest it to them.
- Reusable stainless steel or BPA-free plastic bottles make a great giveaway. If you are at a college or university, include them in orientation kits with a map of water fountains on and around campus.
- Engage members of the public in education around bottled water. For example, build a 'tower of consumption' using empty water bottles from the garbage and recycling, to demonstrate just how much plastic gets tossed in the trash or ends up as litter on the ground.
- If your campus has signed a beverage exclusivity contract, demand to see it, and strategize with others on campus to end it.
- Contact your mayor or councilor and encourage them to make your municipality's events bottled water free, to promote their municipality's tap water and pass a resolution to phase out the sale and purchase of bottled water.