

# The Story of Bottled Water

## A Script

By Annie Leonard  
storyofbottledwater.org

- 1 One of the problems with trying to use less stuff is that sometimes we feel like we really need it. What if you live in a city like, say, Cleveland and you want a glass of water? Are you going to take your chances and get it from the city tap? Or should you reach for a bottle of water that comes from the pristine rainforests of... Fiji?
- 2 Well, Fiji brand water thought the answer to this question was obvious. So they built a whole ad campaign around it. It turned out to be one of the dumbest moves in advertising history.
- 3 See the city of Cleveland didn't like being the butt of Fiji's joke so they did some tests and guess what? These tests showed a glass of Fiji water is lower quality; it loses taste tests against Cleveland tap and costs thousands of times more.
- 4 This story is typical of what happens when you test bottled water against tap water.
- 5 Is it cleaner? Sometimes, sometimes not: in many ways, bottled water is less regulated than tap.
- 6 Is it tastier? In taste tests across the country, people consistently choose tap over bottled water.
- 7 These bottled water companies say they're just meeting consumer demand - But who would demand a less sustainable, less tasty, way more expensive product, especially one you can get almost free in your kitchen? Bottled water costs about 2,000 times more than tap water. Can you imagine paying 2,000 times the price of anything else? How about a \$10,000 sandwich?
- 8 Yet people in the U.S. buy more than half a billion bottles of water every week. That's enough to circle the globe more than 5 times. How did this come to be? Well it all goes back to how our materials economy works and one of its key drivers, which is known as manufactured demand.
- 9 If companies want to keep growing, they have to keep selling more and more stuff. In the 1970s giant soft drink companies got worried as their growth projections started to level off. There's only so much soda a person can drink. Plus it wouldn't be long before people began realizing that soda is not that healthy and turned back to—gasp—drinking tap water.
- 10 Well, the companies found their next big idea in a silly designer product that most people laughed at as a passing yuppie fad. Water is free, people said back then, what will they sell us next, air?
- 11 So how do you get people to buy this fringe product? Simple: You manufacture demand. How do you do that? Well, imagine you're in charge of a bottled water company.

- 12 Since people aren't lining up to trade their hard earned money for your unnecessary product, you make them feel scared and insecure if they *don't* have it. And that's exactly what the bottled water industry did. One of their first marketing tactics was to scare people about tap water, with ads like Fiji's Cleveland campaign.
- 13 "When we're done," one top water exec said, "tap water will be relegated to showers and washing dishes."
- 14 Next, you hide the reality of your product behind images of pure fantasy. Have you ever noticed how bottled water tries to seduce us with pictures of mountains streams and pristine nature? But guess where a third of all bottled water in the U.S. actually comes from? The tap! Pepsi's Aquafina and Coke's Dasani are two of the many brands that are really filtered tap water.
- 15 But the pristine nature lie goes much deeper. In a recent full-page ad, Nestlé said: "bottled water is the most environmentally responsible consumer product in the world." *What?!*
- 16 They're trashing the environment all along the product's life cycle. Exactly how is that environmentally responsible?
- 17 The problems start here with extraction and production where oil is used to make water bottles. Each year, making the plastic water bottles used in the U.S. takes enough oil and energy to fuel a million cars.
- 18 All that energy spent to make the bottle even more to ship it around the planet and then we drink it in about 2 minutes? That brings us to the big problem at the other end of the life cycle—disposal.
- 19 What happens to all these bottles when we're done? Eighty percent end up in landfills, where they will sit for thousands of years, or in incinerators, where they are burned, releasing toxic pollution. The rest gets collected for recycling.
- 20 I was curious about where the plastic bottles that I put in recycling bins go. I found out that shiploads were being sent to India. So, I went there. I'll never forget riding over a hill outside Madras where I came face to face with a mountain of plastic bottles from California. Real recycling would turn these bottles back into bottles. But that wasn't what was happening here. Instead these bottles were slated to be downcycled, which means turning them into lower quality products that would just be chucked later. The parts that couldn't be downcycled were thrown away there; shipped all the way to India just to be dumped in someone else's backyard.
- 21 If bottled water companies want to use mountains on their labels, it'd be more accurate to show one of those mountains of plastic waste.
- 22 Scaring us, seducing us, and misleading us—these strategies are all core parts of manufacturing demand.
- 23 Once they've manufactured all this demand, creating a new multibillion dollar market, they defend it by beating out the competition. But in this case, the competition is our basic human right to clean, safe drinking water.

- 24 Pepsi's Vice Chairman publicly said, "the biggest enemy is tap water!" They want us to think it's dirty and bottled water is the best alternative.
- 25 In many places, public water is polluted thanks to polluting industries like the plastic bottle industry! And these bottled water guys are all too happy to offer their expensive solution, which keeps us hooked on their product.
- 26 It's time we took back the tap.
- 27 That starts with making a personal commitment to not buy or drink bottled water unless the water in your community is truly unhealthy. Yes, it takes a bit of foresight to grab a reusable bottle on the way out, but I think we can handle it.
- 28 Then take the next step—join a campaign that's working for real solutions. Like demanding investment in clean tap water for all. In the US, tap water is underfunded by \$24 billion partly because people believe drinking water only comes from a bottle! Around the world, a billion people don't have access to clean water right now. Yet cities all over are spending millions of dollars to deal with all the plastic bottles we throw out. What if we spent that money improving our water systems or better yet, preventing pollution to begin with?
- 29 There are many more things we can do to solve this problem. Lobby your city officials to bring back drinking fountains. Work to ban the purchase of bottled water by your school, organization, or entire city.
- 30 This is a huge opportunity for millions of people to wake up and protect our wallets, our health and the planet. The good news is: it's already started.
- 31 Bottled water sales have begun to drop while business is booming for safe refillable water bottles. Yay!
- 32 Restaurants are proudly serving "tap" and people are choosing to pocket the hundred or thousands of dollars they would otherwise be wasting on bottled water. Carrying bottled water is on its way to being as cool as smoking while pregnant. We know better now.
- 33 The bottled water industry is getting worried because the jig is up. We're not buying into their manufactured demand anymore. We'll choose our own demands, thank you very much, and we're demanding clean safe water for all.

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

**Adapted** from "The Story of Bottled Water" by Annie Leonard which can be found at <http://storyofstuff.org/bottledwater/>

# BOTTLED WATER MATTERS



## Bottled Water is...

**A HEALTHY BEVERAGE CHOICE.** The U.S. government, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other agencies, medical experts and state officials, have made the fight against obesity one of the top public-health priorities. Bottled water, because of its consistent safety, quality and taste, is an important and healthy consumer alternative to other beverages in helping combat the obesity epidemic. Bottled water provides healthy choices that are safe, convenient and meet our desire for good tasting water at home and on-the-go.

**A STRICTLY-REGULATED FOOD PRODUCT.** Bottled water is a packaged food product regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which requires bottled water to comply with bottled water-specific standards, as well as regulations required of all food products. Each type of bottled water –examples include spring, purified, mineral, sparkling bottled water, artesian or distilled – carries with it specific FDA definitions and standards. Many times, bottled water is subject to further state standards and other requirements set by the International Bottled Water Association, the leading bottled water trade group. Some bottlers use municipal water as a source, but it is not just tap water in a bottle. As part of the bottling process, these bottled waters are additionally purified and produced in accordance with FDA standards. In addition, FDA standards apply to both domestic and imported brands, no matter where they are produced and sold.

**PACKAGED IN SAFE CONTAINERS.** Bottled water is one of thousands of beverage and food products sealed in safe, sanitary containers, which may be made from plastic or glass. Plastics (and all other materials) used for contact with foods or beverages must be allowed by FDA to help assure their safety. The materials used in all bottled water containers are shown to be safe through extensive and rigorous testing.

**AN EFFICIENT USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES.** While nearly all industries use natural resources to manufacture their products, the bottled water industry is particularly efficient and making significant progress to further reduce the environmental impact. The amount of water used for bottled water production accounts for less than 2/100 of a percent (0.02%) of the total ground water withdrawn in the United States each year, according to the Drinking Water Research Foundation.

In addition, plastic beverage bottles account for less than one-third of 1 percent of the waste stream in the U.S. in 2005, according to the National Association of PET Container Resources (NAPCOR). Plastic beverage bottles are among the most recycled products in the U.S., and the bottled water industry is working with other beverage and food producers, municipalities, and recycling advocacy groups to continually increase recycling and reduce the resources needed by using increasingly lighter-weight plastics for containers. Further, the bottled water industry is considered one of the original recyclers as the larger containers used on bottled water coolers may be used repeatedly and recycled at the end of their useful service.

**IMPORTANT IN TIMES OF WATER EMERGENCIES OR DISASTERS.** Bottled water companies respond with efficiency and speed with regard to provide bottled water in coordination with emergency relief operations. The bottled water industry provides millions of bottled water servings in response to natural and man-made disasters each year.

**A LOCAL OPTION.** More than 60 percent of the International Bottled Water Association's membership is made up of small businesses with annual sales of less than \$1 million and a few employees. The overwhelming majority have sales of less than \$10 million. Your local bottler is most likely a family entrepreneur with deep roots and strong ties in your community.

**For more information about IBWA and bottled water, please visit [www.bottledwater.org](http://www.bottledwater.org) or [www.bottledwatermatters.com](http://www.bottledwatermatters.com).**

*Provided by the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA)*

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#### The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

#### I. INTRODUCTION [Adapted]

- 1 Water is a limited natural resource and a public good fundamental for life and health.
- 2 The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity.
- 3 It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights.
- 4 The continuing contamination, depletion and unequal distribution of water is exacerbating existing poverty.
- 5 States parties have to adopt effective measures to realize, without discrimination, the right to water, as set out in this general comment.

#### *The legal bases of the right to water*

- 6 The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.