



## **Ban Plastic Bottled Water**

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With garbage floating in the ocean spanning the area twice the size of Texas, it is about time we open our eyes to this problem. A good place to begin focusing is on plastic bottled water. There has been extensive research explaining the harmful effects of plastic water bottles on our environment. Drinking bottled water also brings general health concerns both from the actual plastic containers and the quality of the water within the containers. The cost and energy required to produce bottled water also raises concerns. In cities across the United States, water is readily available. Why risk your own health, the environment, and break your bank when it is unnecessary? Washington State Community and Technical Colleges can be the leading example by banning the sale of plastic bottled water on all our campuses.

The cost for disposable plastic bottled water is astronomical. According to [Message in a Bottle](#) by Charles Fishman, “bottled water can cost 10,000 times more than tap water—about \$10 per gallon for high-end brands. Americans spend more a year on bottled water than on iPods, movie tickets, milk, or beer (Anderson).” Not only does it cost more to purchase than tap water, it costs more to produce. With the economy in downturn, Americans are looking for any way possible to save money and conserve resources. It takes 32-54 million barrels of oil each year to supply the American demand for plastic bottled water. That is the equivalent of filling each bottle of water produced a quarter of the way full of oil. Aside from using massive amounts of oil, producing plastic bottled water consumes massive amounts of water. For every bottle of water it takes three times the amount of water to produce it. With America consuming more than 33 billion liters of plastic bottled water, it adds up (Sohn). Why are we wasting our precious resources on a product that is readily available at any water fountain or sink?

The costs do not stop there. The idea of recycling these bottles sounds nice; but in reality, it is a lot harder than it sounds. According to the website of recycling company Clayton Ward, they are no longer paying out for plastic bottles. A phone call to Clayton Ward revealed that they have to ship these bottles to Mexico, because there are so few companies in the United States that will break them down. Pacific Steel and Recycling, another Washington State recycling center does not even accept plastic bottles. Recycling disposable plastic bottles uses double the energy consumption and causes twice the amount of pollution than making the product (H.). According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), only one fifth of plastic water bottles are recycled per year and the rest (about 38 billion per year) end up in landfills or littered in streets, lakes, rivers, and oceans.

Not only is plastic bottled water expensive, it is hurting our environment. With only one fifth of plastic water bottles being recycled, we are filling our landfills, rivers, streets, and oceans with waste that takes 1,000 years to biodegrade. Over the course of those 1,000 years, the plastic is leeching harmful chemicals into the environment and killing wildlife. According to the studies by the Pacific Institute, bottling water produces more than 2.5 million pounds of carbon dioxide (Pacific Institute). The 32-54 million barrels of oil used to produce plastic bottled water does not cover the amount of energy it takes to transport the water across the world. To keep up with the American demand of plastic bottled water, the Pacific Institute estimates that it takes 106 billion mega joules of energy (Pacific Institute). Ice caps are melting and the earth is getting warmer, yet we continue to produce and use a product that significantly compounds these issues.

The harmful effects plastic bottled water extends past the general environment into the human body. According to the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC), approximately 70% of all bottled water is exempt from the FDA's bottled water standards, because it is bottled and sold within the same state. Only bottled water that is shipped across state lines is regulated. Even those bottles that are covered by the FDA's specific bottled water standards are not subject to the rigorous standards, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) sets for tap water. According to a study done by the Environmental Working Group (EWG), the top ten US brands of plastic bottled water were found to have alarming levels of contaminants including: bacteria, fertilizer, industrial chemicals, caffeine, pharmaceuticals, chlorine, arsenic, and radioactive isotopes (Environmental Working Group). Unlike plastic bottled water, tap water must be checked weekly for contaminants and is not allowed to have any traces of E. Coli. The EPA requires that the results of these tests be made public, whereas the tests of plastic bottled water do not have to be published. Our society is so worried about health hazards and harmful chemicals entering our bodies. This is why recalls exist for items made with lead or food contaminated with E. coli or Salmonella. Why are we ignoring the fact that the very water we are drinking has contaminants far worse than products that are recalled?

Why focus on plastic bottled water when there are hundreds of other plastic bottled products? It's simple; there are many viable alternatives to getting water. There are numerous brands of BPA free bottles that can be purchased and filled with filtered or tap water. There are machines that can be put on every campus that dispense clean, filtered water into a BPA free container for the cost of buying a plastic water bottled out of the vending

machines. Spigots with filters can be attached to drinking fountains that make it possible to fill your bottle at the fountain.

The Student Government at Columbia Basin College is currently working with the CBC Administration and Foundation to ban the sale of plastic bottled water on our campus. By asking the legislature to ban the product on all Community and Technical Colleges, we will be setting an example for the rest of the state and nation. Washington Community and Technical Colleges would not be the first institutions to ban plastic bottled water. Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri was the first college to ban plastic bottled water. The University of Washington in Seattle is in the process of banning the product as well. Not only are colleges banning plastic bottled water, cities are too. San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, and Chicago are just a few cities that have banned the use of cities dollars to be used to purchase plastic bottled water. It is time we recognize that plastic bottled water is a waste of resources, money, and an unneeded strain on the environment. We can do something about it. Join our cause!

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