

Restaurant-Goers' Guide to Taking Back the Tap

food&waterwatch



Help Your Favorite Restaurants Kick the Bottled Water Habit

Ah, is there anything more refreshing than popping open a chilled bottle of water, knowing that you are partaking of something so much cleaner and fresher than nasty tap water—something from a mountain spring or undefiled aquifer?

If only it were true.

Sadly, despite the marketing and regardless of how many mountaintops or springs are pictured on the label, your bottle of water probably came out of a tap. In fact, it likely came out of a tap in another state hundreds of miles away and had to be trucked to your restaurant, contributing to more vehicle emissions, more use of gasoline and other environmental problems.

We're not saying that your local restaurants are part of some vast earth-ravaging corporate conspiracy. Sure, they can make a tidy profit off a bottle of water with the markup, but they can do the same thing with soft drinks and liquor. Restaurants are often pulled in by marketing ploys—plus they have customers who want and expect bottled water, so they get pressure from both ends.

Cutting down on our attachment to using bottled water, which may actually be less safe in many cases than tap water, starts with us – by not buying bottled water unless absolutely necessary, whether at the store or restaurants or wherever. But we can also spread the word to our favorite establishments to start kicking the bottled water habit themselves. And restaurants are a perfect place to start, particularly restaurants at which you are a frequent or even regular customer.

Educating Yourself

Before you start hammering home the need to reduce, or eliminate, bottled water to the owner or manager of your favorite dining spot, it pays to know what makes bottled water such a problem. You need to know why bottled water falls short of tap water in almost every way if you are going to debunk the myths that bottled water companies have propagated so successfully.



Photo by Andrea Zanivan.

First off, bottled water is expensive. Americans spend billions on bottled water – \$11 billion to \$15 billion in recent years, in fact. A \$2 charge for a 20-ounce bottle of water, for example, is thousands of times more than what you pay for turning on a faucet long enough to fill a 20-ounce glass.

It's also wasteful and environmentally harmful. Millions of barrels of oil are used to create the bottles (since plastic is a petroleum-based product) and then millions more are used to ship those bottles to the factories where they are filled, and then to ship them to the stores and restaurants that want them. And in the end, more than 86 percent of these bottles aren't recycled, ending up clogging landfills instead. That's about two million tons of plastic waste per year.

Even from a health standpoint, bottled water falls short of the mark. As much as 40 percent of bottled water is nothing more than reprocessed tap water. And while tap water is safe in almost all parts of the United States, there's no telling what can get into the water in the process of bottling it. Tests conducted by various concerned

groups have found traces of arsenic, microbes, toxins and other pollutants in various bottled water brands. This isn't something you tend to see in public water supplies because the federal government requires rigorous and frequent safety testing and monitoring of municipal drinking water. The Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates tap water, requires that utility companies test municipal water hundreds of times per month. On the other hand, the Food & Drug Administration, which regulates bottled water, requires only one water test per week by bottling companies.

Moreover, the production of plastic bottles emits toxic chemicals into the air and water and there are concerns that over time, the bottles may leach chemicals such as phthalates into the water they hold.

For more about this issue, visit Food & Water Watch's Take Back the Tap site at www.takebackthetap.org. There, you can learn how to get involved with the campaign, help increase public funding for safe drinking water and more.

Flavor First

How about the myth of tap water tasting bad? Well, it's not always a myth, but it's also not true of every municipal water supply and it's often an overblown perception.

Both restaurateurs and customers will often argue that tap water doesn't taste as good as bottled water, and because of trace minerals and other things in municipal tap water they are sometimes right that the flavor is affected. But odd-tasting water isn't necessarily an indicator of contamination. In addition to traces of perfectly safe minerals, harmless algae blooms and other natural occurrences sometimes add extra—if unwanted—flavor to municipal water during parts of the year, for example. But restaurants can use filtration systems for the water they serve to customers, and probably pay less than they do for stocking their back room with bottle upon bottle of water and having to refrigerate it.

If there is any concern about local water supplies, or a restaurant simply wants to be careful, it is easy to find out about local water quality by contacting the local utility itself.

Even when safety isn't the issue, it can help to know what's in the water so that a restaurant can better choose a filtration system to eliminate any trace elements that might throw flavor off.



What You Can Do

• Pledge to Take Back the Tap

Visit www.takebackthetap.org to pledge to:

- Choose tap water over bottled water whenever possible;
- Fill a reusable bottle with tap water;
- Support public funding for safe and affordable tap water.

• Convince Your Favorite Restaurant to Take Back the Tap

If you know the owner or manager of a restaurant personally, please share with them as a friend the benefits of kicking the bottled water habit. Even if

you don't know them personally, try to arrange for a quick meeting or leave them with some information they can review about the benefits of tap water. In this action guide, you will find various materials that you can copy and hand out.

The information above that you've already read gives you a leg-up in talking about the issue, but leaving something for a person to review at their convenience (running a restaurant is no small task) helps ensure that they won't forget the information you have shared—particularly since you may not have time to share everything with that person in one conversation.

- **Advocate for Tap Water with Your Local Government**

First, government agencies can lead by example but not using bottled water in their offices or at city sponsored events. Cities such as Seattle, Santa Cruz, and Ann Arbor have done just that.

Second, local governments can create educational campaigns for consumers or restaurant owners. The city of San Francisco has joined Food & Water Watch in a campaign to promote tap water and to encourage city restaurants to make the switch. You can check out city guides at www.takebackthetap.org.

Third, government agencies need to work toward maintaining and updating our municipal water systems. Pipes degrade, equipment gets old. If we are going to keep our public water safe—and safer than the bottled stuff—we need to be putting money into our infrastructure and investing in our future health and well-being.

Encourage your local government to endorse a federal water trust fund for water, dedicated funding for pipes and treatment plants. If you haven't signed the Food & Water Watch petition yourself, you can do so at www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/americaswater.

- **Spread the Word**

Join Food & Water Watch as a member and an online activist at www.foodandwaterwatch.org/support-us

For more information:

web: www.foodandwaterwatch.org

email: foodandwater@fwwatch.org

phone: (202) 683-2500

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Restaurant Pledge to Eliminate Sale of Bottled Water

Key Facts:

- Tap water is better regulated and safer than bottled water, and is tested multiple times a day, and a free report on the quality of your water can be acquired from your local water utility.
- Filtering tap water can effectively remove contaminants and unusual taste at a fraction of the cost of bottled water.
- Up to 40 percent of bottled water is just reprocessed tap water; no government agency tests bottled water, and the Food and Drug Administration has less than one full-time employee devoted to bottled water oversight.
- Plastic bottles can leach unhealthy chemicals into the water.
- Over 86 percent of empty plastic water bottles in the United States land in the garbage instead of being recycled, resulting in two million tons of plastic waste each year.

As a chef and/or restaurant owner our business pledges to:

- Eliminate the sale of still bottled water;
- Switch to serving only municipal tap water;
- Help educate customers about the benefits of tap water over bottled water.

BUSINESS _____

CONTACT _____ TITLE _____

PHONE _____ FAX _____

EMAIL _____

STREET _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

FAX TO: 202-683-2501. FOR MORE INFO, CONTACT JON KEESECKER: 202-683-2463 OR JKEESECKER@FWWATCH.ORG
www.takebackthetap.org

Why Your Restaurant Should Take Back the Tap



The Facts About Tap Water

First off, it's important to know that as much as 40 percent of bottled water comes from the tap and is simply reprocessed in a bottling factory, so you're just cutting out the middleman by kicking the bottled water habit. The only reason we all think bottled water is healthier than the tap is because of the marketing hype. After all, when was the last time someone opened a bottle of beer at your establishment and a Swedish bikini team arrived? Or when did someone enjoy a soft drink with their lunch and suddenly bust out with some extreme sports moves?

More than just cutting out the middleman, though, you can help the environment and help educate customers while still providing them with healthy and refreshing water—and you just might save some money and reduce hassles in the process.

You Can Save Money and Protect the Environment

Turning to tap water could actually help save you money. Tap water costs about \$0.002 per gallon compared to the \$0.89 to \$8.26 per gallon charge for bottled water. By switching to reusable carafes for the tabletops or simply refilling glasses as needed, you can also save the trouble of needing to store and refrigerate all those bottles. And it's one less delivery to concern yourself with amongst all your other stocking needs.

U.S. plastic bottle production uses more than 17 million barrels of oil annually. Nearly 90 percent of the empty plastic water bottles in the nation end up in the garbage instead of being recycled. Producing plastic bottles uses energy and emits toxic chemicals. Transporting the bottled water spews pollution into the air, adding to global climate change.

The Environmental Protection Agency requires that utility companies test municipal water hundreds of times per month, while the Food & Drug Administration requires only one water test per week by bottling companies and has miniscule staff resources devoted to bottled water oversight.

Key Points

- Most tap water is just as clean and safe as bottled water.
- The idea that all bottled water is pure is a marketing myth.
- Plastic bottles can leach chemicals into the water.
- About 86 percent of the empty plastic water bottles in the United States land in the garbage instead of being recycled.

As a chef, manager and/or restaurant owner, please pledge to:

- Eliminate the sale of non-carbonated bottled water;
- Switch to serving only municipal tap water;
- Help educate customers about the benefits of tap over bottled water;
- Whenever possible, install a carbonation machine to make sparkling water from the tap.

For more detailed and in-depth information about the problems with bottled water and the benefits of tap water, go online to www.takebackthetap.org. There, you'll find general information and a report from Food & Water Watch called *Take Back the Tap: Why Choosing Tap Wa-*

ter Over Bottled Water is Better for Your Health, Your Pocketbook, and the Environment.

Filtration Facts

In general, because of the generally good tap water quality in the United States, it is not imperative to filter tap water for public safety reasons. If you are curious about the makeup of your water or live in a community that has water problems, you may choose to have your water tested. Lead is a contaminant that can get into water through old pipes, and can be removed with a filter. Your water utility may recommend a specific kind of test or even provide one. Local health departments often provide testing services or have lists of accredited laboratories that do the testing. Then, you can decide whether it is worth filtering your water.

Once you've made your decision, you can share the information about your clean water supply, or your fantastic filtration system, with your customers.

Doing Your Homework

You can contact your local utility to request a copy of the Annual Water Quality Report, also referred to as the Consumer Confidence Report. This report is required by law to provide information about contaminant violations in the water system, and it also addresses what filters are appropriate to use for these contaminants. EPA posts many of these results on its website at www.epa.gov/safewater/dwinfo. Some private laboratories and the health department will also come out and test water if you feel there is a contamination problem

With a little research, you can figure out which water filter best suits your restaurant's needs. You can also contact a local water filtration and purification installation company for advice and price estimates. Be sure to verify licensing and certifications of water distribution operators, and to factor in maintenance and installation costs.

Commercial-grade water filters use many different technologies including calcite/carbon blends, Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) hexametaphosphate crystals, KDF media, UV light, softening resins and reverse osmosis. Each technology is specific to the type of particles to be filtered, so choosing the most effective one for your filtering needs is important.

Whatever technology the filter uses, the most important information for you to know is whether the particular product you are considering has been certified to remove your target contaminants. And, when you're looking for certification, don't just trust the company selling you the



filter--make sure that their product has been tested by an independent certifying agency. National Sanitation Foundation International (NSF), Water Quality Association, and Underwriters Laboratories Inc. are three well-regarded organizations that test and verify water treatment and filtration product claims.

Aside from making sure your filter is working on the appropriate particles, other factors to consider when purchasing a filter for your restaurant include the capacity of the filter, water efficiency (reverse osmosis filters are less water efficient than carbon filters), and other costs, such as installation, maintenance, and replacement filter fees. In addition to tap water filters, you may want to look at filters specifically designed for use with restaurant equipment such as ice makers, coffee makers and soda machines.

Educating Your Customers

Once you've made the switch, you'll be proud of the ways you're supporting your local community and reducing the environmental impact of your business. So, you'll probably want to share the big news with your customers! You can do this by putting up a sign, placing cards on each table, or adding a note to the menu. And of course, chat them up! They'll appreciate that you are taking the initiative to help protect their health, wallets, and communities. Templates and factsheets can be found at www.takebackthetap.org

For more information:

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