

Part 2: Are You a Sucker for Bottled Water?

“**Bottled water.**” Sounds clean, refreshing, and much better than the alternative coming from those old underground pipes, don’t you think? You may want to think twice before you buy that mega economy pack of single serve bottles. The facts are lining up in favor of tap water. Turns out it just might be a myth that’s been marketed towards consumers that bottled water is cleaner.



More than half of all Americans drink bottled water; about a third of the public consumes it regularly. Sales have tripled in the last 10 years, to about \$4 billion a year. This sales bonanza has been fueled by ubiquitous ads picturing towering mountains, pristine glaciers, and crystal-clear springs nestled in untouched forests yielding absolutely pure water.

But, is the marketing image of total purity accurate? Also, are the rules for bottled water stricter than those for tap water? Not exactly. No one should assume that just because he or she purchases water in a bottle that it is necessarily and better regulated, purer, or safer than most tap water.

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) has completed a four-year study of the bottled water industry, including its bacterial and chemical contamination problems. They conducted a review of available information on bottled water and its sources, an in-depth assessment of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and all 50 states’ programs governing bottled water safety, an analysis of governmental and academic bottled water testing results. The NRDC also compared FDA’s Bottled water rules with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules that apply to piped tap water supplied by public water systems. In addition, the NRDC commissioned independent lab testing of more than 1,000 bottles of 103 types of bottled water from many parts of the country (California, the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas).

What did they find?

Their conclusion is that there is no assurance that just because water comes out of a bottle it is any cleaner or safer than water from the tap. And in fact, an estimated 25 percent or more of bottled water is just tap water in a bottle - - sometimes further treated, sometimes not. And since your local tap water is required to be tested, by law, and those test results must be publicly available, there is a greater likelihood that you can verify the safety of your tap water, while you cannot verify the compliance of bottled water.

The explosion in bottled water use in the U.S. has been driven in large measure by marketing designed to convince the public bottled water’s purity and safety. Some of this marketing is misleading, implying the water comes from pristine sources when it does not.

The result is people spend from 240 to over 1,000 times more per gallon for bottled water than they typically do for tap water.

But, if you still think those bottlers that further filter their water is the safest, cleanest, best tasting water; install a good water filter on your tap. You’ll save lots of money!