

Restricting or Banning Bottled Water on College Campuses is Not in the Public Interest

A few colleges have restricted or banned access to bottled water on their campuses. These shortsighted actions will have negative health and fiscal consequences, and are not in the public interest.

People need to drink more water. The consumption of water, whether from the bottle or the tap, is a good thing and any actions that discourage people from drinking bottled water are not in the public interest. Banning or restricting access to bottled water on college campuses directly impacts the right of people to choose the healthiest beverage on the shelf. And for many, bottled water is a critical alternative to other packaged beverages, which are often less healthy. Bottled water must therefore be available wherever packaged beverages are sold.

Important Facts about Bottled Water

✓ **Bottled water is the smart choice for healthy hydration**

For those who want to eliminate or moderate calories, sugar, caffeine, artificial flavors or colors, and other ingredients from their diet, choosing bottled water is the right move. ***In fact, since 1998, approximately 73% of the growth in bottled water consumption has come from people switching from carbonated soft drinks, juices, and milk.***

Choosing bottled water is a smart decision and a healthy choice when it comes to beverage options. People choose bottled water for several reasons, including its refreshing taste, reliable quality, zero calories and additives, and convenience. Removing bottled water from campuses will result in consumers choosing less healthy beverages.

✓ **Bottled water is a key resource for helping to reduce obesity**

One-third of American adults are overweight and another one-third is obese. Drinking zero-calorie beverages, such as water, instead of sugary drinks is regularly cited as a key component of a more healthful lifestyle. For example, even though it promotes greater consumption of tap water, the University of California, Berkeley, decided *not* to ban bottled water because of concerns that it would cause students to drink less healthy, sweetened beverages.

Research published in the American Journal of Public Health (AJPH) has shown that efforts to ban or restrict the sale of bottled can actually lead to increased consumption of less healthy beverages and plastic waste. The study, "[The Unintended Consequences of Changes in Beverage Options and the Removal of Bottled Water on a University Campus](#)," concluded that the bottled water sales ban at the University of Vermont (UVM) resulted in a significant increase (33%) in the consumption of sugary drinks and an increase (6%) in the amount of plastic bottles entering the waste stream.

The University of Michigan opted to invest in expanding access to hydration stations in addition to keeping

bottled water available on its campus. "We're not considering a ban," said Andy Berki, manager of campus sustainability. "We're just working hard on increasing the infrastructure so that people can make a choice."

✓ **Bottled water is the best hydration source when either tap water or consumer health is compromised**

The bottled water industry supports a strong public water system. However, the water from public water systems is often compromised after emergency situations or natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, floods, tornados, fires, or boil alerts). During these times, bottled water is a necessary and reliable option to deliver clean, safe drinking water.

Certain students, faculty members, and staff on college campuses may require reliable access to bottled water due to medical issues, such as compromised immune systems, allergies, cancer, or other significant health conditions. In fact, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that individuals with compromised immune systems drink bottled water.

✓ **Bottled water's environmental footprint is the lowest of all packaged beverages**

Banning bottled water from campuses will just shift consumption to other beverage products whose containers are made of the same material as bottled water. It will not, therefore, reduce the amount of plastic bottles in the waste stream.

Between 2000 and 2014, the average weight of a 16.9-ounce PET plastic bottle has declined 51%, saving 6.2 billion pounds of PET resin since 2000. In fact, many bottled water companies are already using up to 50% recycled material in their plastic bottles. Carbonated soft drinks are less able to significantly reduce the amount of plastic in their containers because the thinner plastic isn't able to contain the drink's carbonation.

All bottled water containers are 100% recyclable, and PET plastic bottled water containers are the single most recycled item in nationwide curbside collection programs. At 37%, the recycling rate for single-serve PET plastic bottled water containers has more than doubled in the past 10 years, and PET plastic bottled water containers are the most frequently recycled PET beverage container in curbside recycling programs. PET plastic bottled water containers, measured in tons of landfill space, make up just 3.3% of all beverage containers that end up in landfills. Waste percentage numbers are much higher for the glass (66.7%), aluminum (7.9%), and plastic soda bottles (13.3%) that end up in landfills. And, while the bottled water industry supports strong campus and community recycling initiatives, a continued focus on increased recycling is critical.

✓ **Bottled water is comprehensively regulated and consistently reliable**

Bottled water is comprehensively regulated by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a packaged food product and it provides a consistently safe and reliable source of drinking water. By federal law, the FDA regulations governing the safety and quality of bottled water are as stringent as the EPA regulations that govern tap water. In some cases, the bottled water regulations are more stringent. And, in some very important cases like lead, bottled water regulations are substantially more stringent.

All bottled water products - whether from groundwater or public water sources - are produced utilizing a multi-barrier approach. From source to finished product, a multi-barrier approach helps prevent possible harmful contamination to the finished product as well as storage, production, and transportation equipment. Measures in a multi-barrier approach may include one or more of the following: reverse osmosis, distillation, micro-filtration, carbon filtration, ozonation, and ultraviolet (UV) light.

As a result of comprehensive government regulation and the effective multi-barrier production system, bottled water provides a safe, consistent source of clean drinking water. There is, however, an inherent variability in public water system quality due to its method of delivery (i.e., through a piped distribution system and not in a sealed container).

✓ **Bottled water has an important economic role in campus life**

Most colleges and universities derive significant revenues from the sale of bottled water and other beverages. Banning or restricting bottled water sales could jeopardize the funding of important academic programs and faculty positions.

Those forced to leave campus to buy bottled water will likely bundle that purchase with other products normally bought on campus. This will result in even more revenue loss for those colleges and universities, further jeopardizing academic programs and faculty positions.