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May 15, 2020

Kevin Loria - Reporter  
Consumer Reports  
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[externalrelations@cr.consumer.org](mailto:externalrelations@cr.consumer.org)

CC: Kevin Doyle – Executive Editor  
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Dear Mr. Loria:

I'm writing in regard to your article "[How to Eat Less Plastic](#)," published on [www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org) on April 30, 2020 because it contains false and misleading information about bottled water.

It's unfortunate that you did not reach out to IBWA in advance of writing this story because it would have allowed us to provide you with clear information to provide to your readers about whether consumers need to be concerned about microplastics in bottled water. We kindly request that you update your online story to include the bottled water industry's point of view on this very important topic.

Here are the facts:

Your article tells people not to rely on bottled water and uses a single flawed study to support your recommendation. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) asked scientists to review this study and they found that the particles in Prof. Sherry Mason's research had not been identified as plastic but since the alternatives would not be expected in bottled water, they could be described as "probably plastic". "Probably plastic" is not "plastic."

Data on microplastics is still limited and conclusions are not reliable and differ from one study to another. This is because there is currently no official standardized methodology to measure microplastics, nor is there scientific consensus on exposure and impact on health. For example, the Nile Red dye method, which was the method used by Prof. Mason, is unreliable for measuring microplastics, as it can pick up mineral content and produce false positives. Additionally, as the size of a microplastics particle can be ten times smaller than a hair, they can be found all around us, on surfaces or in the air. This can impact the analytical results if laboratories are not following a very rigorous protocol, with strict precautions, to minimize the occurrence of "cross contamination."

A scientific study published in February 2018 in the peer-reviewed journal *Water Research*—"Analysis of microplastics in water by micro-Raman spectroscopy: Release of

plastic particles from different packaging into mineral water” by Schymanski et al.—concluded that no statistically relevant amount of microplastic can be found in water in single-serve plastic bottles.

And a more recent *Water Research* study (2019)—“Microplastics in freshwaters and drinking water: Critical review and assessment of data quality,” by Koelmans et al.—reviewed 50 microplastic studies, found that only four of these studies passed research quality standards, and concluded that more data is needed to accurately evaluate potential exposure and risk for human health. (This study was financially supported by the World Health Organization.)

As you may know, bottled water has outsold carbonated soft drinks (by volume) to become the No.1 packaged beverage in the United States for the fourth year in a row. Americans are making greater efforts to live a healthy lifestyle by choosing healthier foods and beverages, and drinking water – tap, bottled, or filtered – should therefore be encouraged. With the high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in the United States, bottled water provides our on-the-go society a safe, healthy, convenient, great tasting beverage choice. Discouraging people from choosing this healthy drink option is not in the public interest.

Consumers can remain confident that bottled water, like all food and beverages, is strictly regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and is safe to drink. As with all food packaging materials, bottled water containers must be made from food contact substances approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This means the plastic containers used for bottled water products have undergone FDA scrutiny prior to being available for use in the marketplace. FDA has determined that containers used by the bottled water industry are safe for use with food and beverage products—including bottled water—and they do not pose a health risk to consumers. Individual-sized bottled water products are packaged in polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic containers, and for more than 30 years, PET plastic has been approved as safe for food and beverage contact by FDA and similar regulatory agencies throughout the world. PET plastic is used in the containers for many other beverages, including soft drinks, juices, beer, wine, and spirits.

While many published articles on microplastics have focused solely on bottled water, it is important to recognize that thousands of other food and beverage products also use plastic containers. Moreover, and perhaps even more important, microplastic particles are found in all aspects of our environment – soil, air, and water.

As mentioned above, there currently is no scientific consensus on a testing methodology or the potential health impacts of microplastic particles. Therefore, reports in the media and online do nothing more than unnecessarily scare consumers.

This point was confirmed in an August 2019 World Health Organization (WHO) analysis of current research on microplastic particles in drinking water. The WHO report found: “Based on the limited information we have, microplastics in drinking water don’t appear to pose a health risk at current levels.” The report also stated: “There are no studies on the impacts of ingested microplastics on human health and there are only a limited number of animal studies of questionable reliability and relevance.” The report also

noted that “[a]lthough there is insufficient information to draw firm conclusions on the toxicity related to the physical hazard of plastic particles, particularly the nano size particles, no reliable information suggests it is a concern through drinking-water exposure.”

Because there is no scientific evidence to suggest that microplastic particles pose a health risk, FDA has not issued any regulations concerning these substances in foods and beverages. Any regulatory action concerning microplastic particles would need to be based on sound science, including demonstrating a correlation between the levels of this substance found in foods and beverages and any potential adverse health effects.

Bottled water, as a packaged food product, is strictly and comprehensively regulated by FDA. All bottled water products 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. Many of the steps in a multi-barrier system are effective in safeguarding bottled water from microbiological and other contamination. Measures in a multi-barrier approach may include one or more of the following: source protection, source monitoring, reverse osmosis, distillation, micro-filtration, carbon filtration, ozonation, and ultraviolet (UV) light.

As always, the bottled water industry is committed to providing consumers with the safest and highest quality products, and we are following any scientific developments on this subject closely.

We kindly ask that you review the information provided above and update your article to more accurately reflect the facts about bottled water quality and safety.

Sincerely,

Jill Culora  
Vice President of Communications  
International Bottled Water Association