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Everyday Cheapskate
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Mary Hunt
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Dear Ms. Hunt,

I am contacting you regarding your October 22, 2015, Everyday Cheapskate column, "[What Retailers Don't Want You to Know About Tap Water](#)." While your column seeks to advise consumers with helpful information and make smart financial and lifestyle choices, in the case of this article, you actually provided your readers with inaccurate and false information about bottled water. It is unfortunate that you did not contact the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) when preparing your column.

Both tap water and bottled water are federally regulated, as you noted. However, your claim that bottled water is less safe is absolutely false. Bottled water is comprehensively regulated by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). By federal law, the FDA regulations governing the safety and quality of bottled water must be at least as stringent as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for tap water. And, in some very important cases, bottled water regulations are substantially more stringent.

You also state that tap water is "safer" and "healthier" than bottled water. When compared directly to one another, the fact is that bottled water provides consumers with a far safer and reliable source of hydration. A Drinking Water Research Foundation (DWRf) [study](#) examined and compared the microbial health risks of tap water and bottled water, specifically examining differences in quality monitoring, regulatory standards violations, advisories, and distribution system conditions. This study found that as a consequence of the differences in regulations, distribution systems, operating (manufacturing) practices, and microbial standards of quality, public drinking water supplies present a substantially higher human risk than do bottled waters for illness due to waterborne organisms.

In fact, the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) directly attribute 19.5 million annual cases of acute gastroenteritis (vomiting and diarrhea) to tap water.

On a gallon-for-gallon basis, bottled water is tested up to 30 times more frequently than tap water for nearly all of the same contaminants. It should be noted that both bottled water and public water systems test more frequently than the minimum number of samples required each month by respective FDA and EPA regulations, often on an hourly basis. DWRF also did a [side-by-side comparison](#) of FDA bottled water regulations and EPA tap water regulations to help people better understand how the two are regulated.

Regarding your fluoride claim, there are many sources of fluoride, and the amount of fluoride exposure varies greatly by community and individual. Approximately two-thirds of communities in the United States fluoridate their public drinking water supplies. Those who live in communities that do not fluoridate public drinking water, who get their drinking water from wells, or who filter their fluoridated tap water will not be getting fluoride in their drinking water. Fluoride is present in many foods and beverages and almost all toothpaste contains fluoride. Too much exposure to fluoride can lead to a condition called fluorosis, which results in stains to the teeth. Consumers should therefore look at how much fluoride they are receiving as part of an overall diet and should contact their health-care provider or dental-care provider for their recommendation.

For those who want fluoride in their drinking water and wish to choose bottled water, approximately 20 IBWA member companies make clearly-labeled fluoridated bottled water products under stringent FDA guidelines. For a complete list of these brands, which are available in many markets across the country, please visit [IBWA's website](#).

Lastly, I should point out that as a popular retail food product, bottled water is available at many differing price points. When alluding to differences in cost between tap and bottled water, opponents typically cite retail prices from convenience or drug stores, where bottled water prices are typically higher. According to the Beverage Marketing Corporation (BMC), the average wholesale price per gallon of bottled water was \$1.20 in 2014. BMC also notes that research shows consumers most often tend to buy bottled water in bulk from supermarkets or large discount retailers as they often prefer to purchase bottled water in cost-saving volume.

Providing consumers with accurate and fact-based information is important, especially when it concerns hydration and healthy diet choices. You can learn more about bottled water by visiting www.bottledwater.org. Drinking water, from the tap, using a filter, or in a bottle, is always a healthy choice – on that we can certainly agree. Please let me know if you have any questions, I am happy to chat.

Sincerely,

Chris Hogan
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