



# Sustainable Practices

## Reusable Water Bottles



*EH&S Fact Sheet*  
*September 2007*



### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY

University Park Campus  
837 Downey Way, Stonier Hall 102B  
Los Angeles, CA 90089-1143  
Tel: 213-740-6448

Health Sciences Campus  
1540 Alcazar St., CHP 148  
Los Angeles, CA 90033-9005  
Tel: 323-442-2200

<http://capsnet.usc.edu/ehs/>

Each year, Americans dispose of 38 billion water bottles (\$1 billion dollars worth of plastic) in landfills. Just last year, Americans went through about 50 billion plastic water bottles, which translates to 167 per person and at a cost of \$15 billion. That's more than Americans spent on ipods or movie tickets (Fishman). Water bottles are made of recyclable polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic, yet the national recycling rate for PET is only 14.5%. We all share the responsibility for their impact, so why not purchase a reusable water bottle in place of single use water bottles? It could be used at work, at the gym, and also at home.

- The Container Recycling Institute calculates that if we went on a national campaign to increase beverage container recycling to 80%, the savings in greenhouse gas production would be the equivalent to taking 2.4 million cars off the road for a year.
- The Institute also says that if the recycling content of plastic bottles was 25% of the recycling effort, it would save enough crude oil to electrify 680,000 American homes for a year.
- Beverage bottles and cans are not only a large portion of packaging, but are also some of the most easily recycled and most economically valuable materials in the waste stream.

Taste, of course, is highly personal. Americans love to belittle the quality of their tap water. But in blind taste tests, with waters at equal temperatures, presented in identical glasses, ordinary people can rarely distinguish between tap water, spring water, and luxury waters. At the height of a very famous water manufacturer's popularity, its co-owner was asked on a live network radio show one morning to pick his brand from a lineup of seven carbonated waters served in paper cups. It took him five tries (Fishman).

Most of the common brands of bottled water are simply tap water that is put through an energy-intensive reverse-osmosis filtration process. The perfectly clean tap water is (A) re-cleaned, (B) bottled so that the taste is the same regardless of whether it's sold in Texas or California, and (C) highly marketed on its purity.

Packing bottled water in lunch boxes, grabbing a half-liter from the fridge as we dash out the door, and accumulating half-finished bottles in your car's cup holders, all happen because of convenience.

- It's really not much more trouble to have reusable water bottles, cleaned and filled, and then placed them in the lunch box or the fridge.
- Next time you reach for that single use water bottle, ask yourself: "Does the value to me equal the \$1.20 that I'm spending on it?" and also "Does the value equal the impact I'm about to leave behind?"
- Bottled water is not a sin, but it is a choice.

Works Cited: Fishman, Charles. "Message in a Bottle." *Fast Company Magazine* Jul. 2007.

More on this topic can be found here: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conserv/priorities/msw.htm>

**Please contact EH&S at 213-740-6448 for more information.**

EH&S Fact Sheets are intended to facilitate team discussions in your department. Post the monthly topic on your departmental bulletin board.