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January 29, 2021

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Dear Editors,

The International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) strongly disagrees with the many false claims made in The Guardian's Opinion Science piece titled: "[Do you drink bottled water? Read this](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/28/do-you-drink-bottled-water?Read+this)" (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/28/do-you-drink-bottled-water-read-this>) published online on January 28, 2021. We request that you publish our letter as a response to this anti-bottled water opinion piece. That will provide your readers with a more balanced coverage of this issue.

The opinion author, freelance writer Adrienne Matei, includes many false and misleading statements to support her obvious dislike for bottled water. But the facts speak otherwise; specifically:

- Americans are making greater efforts to live a healthy lifestyle by choosing healthier foods and beverages. As a result, drinking water – tap, bottled, or filtered – is important and should be encouraged. Bottled water is a healthy and convenient alternative to other less healthy packaged drinks. 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.
- Bottled water has the smallest environmental footprint of all packaged drinks. Even with continued growth and increased consumption, results from a [2018 Water and Energy Use Study](https://bottledwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IBWA-Exec.-Summary_14Nov2018-003AL121318.pdf) ([https://bottledwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IBWA-Exec.-Summary\\_14Nov2018-003AL121318.pdf](https://bottledwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IBWA-Exec.-Summary_14Nov2018-003AL121318.pdf)), conducted by the Antea Group for IBWA, show that the amount of water and energy used to produce bottled water products in North America is less than all other types of packaged beverages. On average, only 1.39 liters of water

(including the 1 liter of water consumed) and 0.21 mega joules of energy are used to produce 1 liter of finished bottled water.

- For over a decade, the majority of growth in bottled water consumption, relative to other beverages, has come from people switching to bottled water from other less-healthy packaged drinks. As people are increasingly choosing water to drink fewer calories, they are making a healthy choice that has the added benefit of helping the environment. Not only are bottled water containers 100 percent recyclable (including the caps), but they also contain much less plastic than soda and other packaged beverages. Soda containers, on average, use 142 percent more PET plastic than bottled water containers (23.9 grams vs. 9.89 grams for 16.9-ounce containers). Soft drinks and other sugary beverages need thicker plastic containers due to their carbonation and/or bottling processes.
- In addition, bottled water drinkers using curbside recycling programs recycle their containers at a higher rate than people consuming other drinks. Of all PET containers recycled through curbside collection systems, bottled water containers make up approximately 55 percent. This compares to soda containers, which are 15 percent (source: National Association of PET Container Resources).
- Nine out of 10 Americans (91 percent) expect bottled water to be available wherever other drinks are sold, according to a survey conducted on behalf of IBWA by The Harris Poll. The current healthy consumption shift from sugary drinks to bottled water could also work in reverse. If bottled water is not available, 74 percent of people say that they will turn to other packaged drinks, not tap water, The Harris Poll found (<https://bottledwater.org/nr/consumers-want-bottled-water-to-be-available-wherever-drinks-are-sold-and-if-its-not-most-will-choose-another-packaged-beverage-that-uses-much-more-plastic/>).
- There have been several false and misleading media reports about microplastic particles in bottled water products. 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. While many of the articles on microplastics have focused solely on bottled water, it is important to note 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. There currently is no scientific consensus on a testing methodology or the potential health impacts of microplastic particles. Therefore, the author’s claims do nothing more than unnecessarily scare consumers.
- IBWA members take consumer health and safety very seriously, which is why IBWA, in the absence of federal requirements, set stringent standards for PFAS, which all IBWA bottler members must meet. While not mandated by law, IBWA requires its members to test their bottled water products annually for PFAS, using the EPA’s Method 537.1. IBWA has adopted a PFAS standard of 5 ppt for

one PFAS compound and 10 ppt for more than one compound. This is more stringent than any current state or federal requirement. EPA has set a 70 ppt “health advisory” limit for tap water (not a maximum contaminant level (MCL)).

- The claim by Consumer Reports (CR) that bottled water products with PFAS levels of greater than 1 part per trillion (ppt) pose a human health risk is not based on sound science. The 1 ppt PFAS limit used by CR is not a standard generally recognized as appropriate by the scientific community. Moreover, the method detection limit used by CR cannot accurately and reliably detect the amount of PFAS in bottled water. As a result, their reporting on this issue is misleading and will unnecessarily frighten consumers.

IBWA members are committed to providing consumers with the safest and highest quality products. Bottled water, as a packaged food product, is strictly and comprehensively regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and is subject to stringent standards for safety, quality, production, and labeling. In addition to FDA's Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), which are required of all foods, bottled water must comply with several other regulations, including the specific bottled water Standard of Identity, Standard of Quality, and GMPs.

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 UV light.

Bottled water is America’s favorite drink for a reason: it is a safe, convenient, great tasting alternative to other less healthy packaged drinks. Attempts to deter people from enjoying bottled water will lead them to consume less healthy beverages that contain unwanted sugar, caffeine, or other additives. And the packaging used for these other drinks has a much larger impact on the environment. With the high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in the United States, discouraging people from choosing the healthiest drink option is not in the public interest.

Sincerely,

Jill Culora  
Vice President of Communications  
International Bottled Water Association