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August 6, 2021

Elisabeth Ribbans
The Guardian – Readers' Editor
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Dear Ms Ribbans:

I am writing regarding your article "*Environmental impact of bottled water 'up to 3,500 times greater than tap water'*," which The Guardian published on August 5, 2021. This story reports on a study that uses calculations that are based on the hypothetical, and entirely unrealistic, premise that people will drink only tap water, only bottled water, or only filtered tap water. In fact, the authors of the study noted their scenarios are extreme and "may not be probable," which The Guardian did not report.

In addition, both the study and The Guardian's article is biased, as they do not include the industry's point of view on the environmental impact of bottled water. However, the study does cite a long-time bottled water critic. This bias is further demonstrated by The Guardian's efforts in the article to downplay the study's finding about higher rates of bladder cancer and lower life expectancies among tap water drinkers. In addition, the source for the false assertion that it takes "17 million barrels of oil to make bottled water containers," the University of Louisville, has stated that the university never made that claim.

The International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) kindly requests that The Guardian update its story to include the facts about bottled water so that your readers receive coverage on this issue that is more balanced.

Here are the facts:

- The drinking water choices study reviewed in The Guardian's article is based on the hypothetical, and entirely unrealistic, premise that people will drink only tap water, only bottled water, or only filtered tap water. However, results from IBWA's Harris Poll show that most bottled water drinkers (71%) drink both tap and bottled water. That same poll shows people are consuming bottled water when they are out and about *instead of* choosing less healthy calorie-laden beverages. Only (18%) of those polled said they drink "only" bottled water. And only 10% said they only drink tap or filtered tap water.

Those results indicate that most bottled water drinkers are "water" drinkers in general, preferring to consume a calorie- and additive-free beverage *instead of* other packaged drinks, especially when away from home.

Sales data support the statement that consumers prefer to drink bottled water, as soda and juice sales have declined during the past decade while bottled water sales have increased. In fact, since 2010, approximately 44 percent of the growth in bottled water consumption in the United States has come from people switching from carbonated soft drinks and juices to bottled water, according to [Beverage Marketing Corporation sales data](#). See: https://bottledwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2020BWstats_BMC_pub2021BWR.pdf)

- Drinking zero-calorie beverages, such as water, instead of sugary drinks is regularly cited as a key component of a more healthful lifestyle. Promoting greater consumption of water from all sources—tap, bottled, or filtered—can only benefit those efforts. One of the simplest changes a person can make is to switch to drinking water instead of other beverages that are heavy with sugar and calories. Bottled water is a smart decision and a healthy choice when it comes to beverage options.

Given the critical importance of proper hydration, and the increase in obesity and diabetes rates worldwide, any efforts to discourage people from drinking bottled water are not in the public interest.

- Consumers choosing bottled water over other packaged beverages is actually having a beneficial impact on the environment. Because, in addition to being the healthiest packaged beverage product, bottled water that is packaged in PET plastic has the smallest environmental footprint of all packaged drinks. Products such as carbonated soft drinks, juices, and other sugary beverages require far more plastic packaging due to carbonation and manufacturing processes (using at least 142 percent more plastic) and have a greater environmental impact than bottled water. [See here](#): https://bottledwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Environmental_Impact_of_Drink_Packaging_2021_800.jpg

That means bottled water drinkers are making a choice that is both good for their health and the environment.

- All bottled water containers are 100 percent recyclable—even the caps, and, as an industry, IBWA supports strong community recycling initiatives and recognize that a continued focus on increased recycling is important for everyone. In addition, PET bottled water containers are the most recognized and most recycled containers in curbside programs, making up nearly 55 percent of all PET plastic beverage containers collected.
- 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/).

Bottled water is America's favorite drink for a reason: it is a safe, convenient, great tasting alternative to other less healthy packaged drinks. Research shows that 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 those other drinks has a greater 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