



1700 Diagonal Road, Suite 650
Alexandria, VA 22314
T: 703.647.4609
iculora@bottledwater.org
www.bottledwater.org

September 29, 2021

David Lazarus, Business Columnist
david.lazarus@latimes.com

Kimi Yoshino, LA Times Managing Editor, Business
kimi.yoshino@latimes.com

Ms. Yoshino and Mr. Lazarus:

I am writing in regard to the column [“You do know that, in most cases, bottled water is just tap water?”](#) published September 28, 2021, on the *Los Angeles Times* website. Mr. Lazarus reached out to IBWA for industry sales data, so we are disappointed to see that, although he had the opportunity, he did not ask for the industry’s views on his erroneous claim that bottled water is “tap water in a bottle.” Interestingly, Mr. Lazarus included quotes from statisticians, academics, and municipal water employees—but not from a representative of the bottled water industry. We can only assume that Mr. Lazarus knew including industry’s perspective would mean his inflammatory and false statements about bottled water would be rebutted by the facts. His reporting style seems contrary to the journalist norm of getting information from both sides when reporting on an issue.

We respectfully request that the online article either be removed or edited to address inaccuracies and include omitted facts. We also request that a correction be included in a print edition. As it stands, this article grossly misinforms *LA Times* readers about the vital role bottled water plays, not only as a healthy packaged beverage choice but also a safe and reliable drinking water for those who either cannot or choose not to rely on their municipal tap water systems.

The error of discouraging consumers from choosing bottled water

Americans are making great efforts to live a better lifestyle by choosing healthier foods and beverages, and drinking water—tap, bottled, or filtered—should be encouraged. While the COVID-19 pandemic has motivated some consumers to be more health-conscious, we should not forget that the high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in our on-the-go society have also prompted people to choose bottled water: the safe, healthy, convenient packaged beverage choice. Discouraging people from choosing this healthy drink option is not in the public interest.

Bottled water is not just “tap water in a bottle.”

There are many different types of bottled water: spring water, sparkling water, artesian water, and mineral water all come from protected groundwater sources; purified water uses a public water system source. While some bottled water companies use public water sources for their purified bottled water products, it is important to note, however, that bottled water is not “just tap water in a bottle.” (For transparency, Coke and Pepsi, the companies mentioned in your article, are not members of IBWA.)

Once the water from a public water system enters the bottled water plant, several processes are employed to ensure that it meets the standard for purified water in the U.S. Pharmacopeia, 23rd Revision, as required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations. Those treatments may include one or more of the following: reverse osmosis, distillation, micro-filtration, carbon filtration, ozonation, and ultraviolet (UV) light. Some bottlers add minerals to the water for taste. The finished water product is then placed in a bottle under sanitary conditions and sold to the consumer. To view a schematic of the purified bottled water process, visit https://bottledwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Purified-Bottled-Water-Treatment-Schematic_r.jpg.

The chemical and physical quality of this water is not the same as water that comes out of the tap. If the finished water does not meet the strict FDA regulations, then it is deemed adulterated and subject to recall.

Consumers can be certain of the safety of their bottled water. By federal law, the FDA regulations governing the safety and quality of bottled water must be as protective of public health as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for tap water. And, in some cases, such as lead, the bottled water regulations are more stringent.

Commercial process for purchasing municipal water

When a bottled water company (or any other commercial user) purchases water from municipalities and public authorities, those purchase agreements typically include permits with time limits and take into account environmental protection issues. In addition, when public water systems allow companies to purchase their water, they do so because they have excess capacity. Selling water to any commercial user generates revenue for the cities. Ultimately, that means the money municipalities make from the sale of their excess water makes it less likely for them to have to increase water rates and/or impose taxes on their residents.

When a bottler uses a public water source for its products (purchasing the water like any other commercial user), the company employs several processes to ensure that the bottled water meets [FDA’s purified water standard](#). In short, that means purified bottled water is never “just tap water in a bottle.”

Bottlers that use municipal water systems as their source work in concert with community water authorities regarding the security and safety of the system’s source. After the source water has entered the bottling plant and gone through the various

processes, bottlers then place the now purified water product in a sealed bottle under sanitary conditions before selling it to consumers.

The truth about bottled water and litter

A [2020 litter study by Keep America Beautiful](#), “the most comprehensive study of litter in America” since 2009, notes that—although litter made of plastic comprised 38.6 percent of all litter, wine and liquor, beer, sports and energy drinks, soda, and juice beverage containers far outnumbered bottled water containers in inappropriately discarded litter. Of that littered plastic, the second and third most littered items in America were plastic films and food-packaging films, such as candy wrappers or snack bags. In fact, plastic bottled water containers don’t even make Keep America Beautiful’s list of Top 20 Most Littered Items in the United States. (But single-serve wine and liquor and soda containers do.)

However, bottled water containers, which are 100 percent recyclable, are the most recognized and most recycled containers in curbside programs, making up nearly 55 percent of all PET plastic beverage containers collected.

Environmental impact of bottled water containers

The fact that consumers are choosing bottled water over other packaged beverages is 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/wpcontent/uploads/2021/05/Environmental Impact of Drink Packaging 2021 800.jpg](https://bottledwater.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/05/Environmental_Impact_of_Drink_Packaging_2021_800.jpg))

Sometimes, consumers can’t drink tap water.

The bottled water industry supports strong public water systems, which are important for providing citizens with clean and safe drinking water. However, sometimes water from public water systems can be compromised after emergency situations or natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, floods, tornados, fires, or boil alerts). In addition, there has been a recent increase in instances of tap water being contaminated with lead and/or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). During such times, bottled water is a necessary and reliable option to deliver clean, safe drinking water. Bottled water is available in times of emergencies because the bottled water market is strong and viable throughout the year.

And we shouldn’t forget that certain individuals may require reliable access to bottled water due to medical issues, such as compromised immune systems, allergies, cancer, or other significant health conditions. In fact, the [CDC recommends](#) that individuals with compromised immune systems drink bottled water.

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 packaged beverages that contain unwanted sugar, caffeine, or other additives—not tap water. And the packaging used for those other drinks has a greater impact on the environment. With the public's renewed focus on health due to COVID-19—and 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