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Dear Editors:

I am writing on behalf of the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) regarding an article by National Geographic science reporting resident Priyanka Runwal, "[How 'everywhere chemicals' help uterine fibroids grow,](#)" which was published on your website on January 13, 2023. I want to draw your attention to a serious error regarding the picture that was used as the focal point of the story.

The picture of PET plastic bottled water containers is an inaccurate choice, especially considering there is no mention of PET or these containers in your story. National Geographic's use of this picture may mislead people into thinking the story is about PET plastic bottles, which it is not.

The information below can help explain some of the science behind the chemistry of PET and uncover where some of the confusion may derive.

- Although the PET acronym stands for polyethylene terephthalate, there are no phthalates in PET plastic. It does not contain the regulated phthalate (organic ester of phthalic acid) diethylhexyl phthalate (DEHP), nor any other phthalates like dibutyl phthalate, di-n-octyl phthalate (DOP), butyl benzyl phthalate, etc.
- Despite its suffix (terephthalate), PET is not a plasticizer phthalate. Phthalates are low molecular weight monoesters made from ortho-phthalic acid. PET is a high molecular weight polyester made from terephthalic acid. They are completely different chemicals.
- PET is approved as safe for food and beverage contact by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and similar regulatory agencies throughout the world and has been for more than 40 years. PET plastic water bottles, commonly small, portable 16.9 (half-liter) and 24-ounce sizes, are safe and reliable for food contact use. PET is used not only for bottled water but also in a variety of food

packaging, including everything from peanut butter, soft drinks, and juices to beer, wine, and spirits.

- National Geographic's use of a picture of PET bottled water containers incorrectly links those bottles to phthalates and may unnecessarily frighten consumers and cause them not to drink bottled water. That is not in the best interests of your readers. Anything that discourages people from drinking safe, healthy, convenient bottled water will lead them to consume less healthy beverages that contain unwanted sugar, caffeine, or other additives. And with the high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in the United States, we are sure you'll agree hindering people from choosing bottled water, the healthiest packaged drink option, is not in the public interest.

I respectfully request that your online article and any social media posts be updated to include a more appropriate image that reflects the contents in your story. As it currently appears, the article seriously misinforms consumers about the safety and quality of bottled water.

Sincerely,

Jill Culora
Vice President Communications
International Bottled Water Association