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Charlotte Moore, BBC Chief Content Officer
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Thomas Ling, Digital Editor, BBC Science Focus

Dear Editors:

I am writing on behalf of the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) regarding your online article "Drinking bottled water is much worse for you than tap, scientists find" (<https://www.sciencefocus.com/news/water-bottle-unhealthy-study>). This article contains numerous false and misleading claims about the safety and quality of bottled water. We request that you either remove them from your website or update your story to include the following important bottled water facts so that your readers are not misled about this safe, healthy, and convenient consumer product.

It is simply not true that "*bottled water in the US is often not subject to the same rigorous quality and safety checks as tap water,*" as stated in your article. By federal law, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (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. (See section 410 of the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.) And, in some cases, such as lead, bottled water regulations are more stringent.

FDA has established bottled water Standards of Quality (SOQs) for more than 90 substances (21 C.F.R. § 165.110 (b)). The vast majority of FDA bottled water quality standards are the same as EPA's maximum contaminant levels (MCL) for tap water systems. The few differences are usually the results of the substance (usually tap water disinfectant byproducts) not being found in bottled water or the substance is regulated under another provision of law, such as FDA's food additives program.

Your article falsely states "Some studies have also estimated that [up to two-thirds of bottled water in the US is repackaged tap water](#)," while linking to a study that correctly says: "most bottled water sold globally (nearly 60% in 2018) is purified tap water. There is a big difference between "repackaged tap water" and "purified tap water." Purified bottled water that is made by using water from a public water system is not "just tap water in a bottle." Once the tap water enters the bottled water plant several processes

are employed to ensure that it meets the purified water standard of the U.S. Pharmacopeia, 23rd Revision. These treatments can include reverse osmosis, distillation, or de-ionization. The finished water product, which is far different from the water that comes out of your tap, is then placed in a bottle under sanitary conditions and sold to consumers. To suggest that there is little difference in the quality and safety in tap and bottled water is simply not true.

In addition, your article misleads readers when it states: *“It is estimated that between 10 and 78 per cent of bottled water samples contain contaminants, including microplastics and various other substances including phthalates (chemicals used to make plastics more durable).”* However, the original study for the 78% figure mentioned in your reference is being taken out of context. The original research concluded that *“Levels detected for each class of endocrine disruptor is not of concern for health.”*

And finally, your article relies on information from “commentary” (Rethinking bottled water in public health discourse <https://gh.bmj.com/content/9/8/e015226>) that, in Table 1, cites the United Nations but includes a footnote saying: *“The content of this publication has not been approved by the United Nations and it does not reflect the views of the United Nations or their officials or member states.”* That clearly misleads consumers about the validity of this information.

Bottled water is just one of thousands of food and beverage products (including soft drinks and juices) packaged in plastic. While many studies on micro- and nanoparticles have used water samples (tap and bottled), it is important to understand that researchers use water because it is the least complex testing medium. Conclusions that drinking water is a major route for oral intake of micro- and nanoplastics are not justified based on the current science available. In addition, there are currently no certified testing methods and no scientific consensus on the potential health impacts of micro- and nanoplastics.

Moreover, the FDA, the agency that regulates bottled water as a food product, says *“it is not aware of scientific evidence that would support consumers being concerned about the potential level of microplastic or nanoplastic contamination in food, including bottled water.”*

We request that your story be removed or updated so that your readers have the facts regarding this issue. We are also concerned that misleading consumers about the safety and quality of bottled water could deter consumers from drinking the healthiest packaged beverage on the shelf: bottled water. In 2023, bottled water outsold carbonated soft drinks (by volume) again, retaining its title as America’s favorite packaged beverage for the eighth year in a row.

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. With the high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in our on-the-go society, bottled water provides a safe, healthy, and, as is noted in your story, convenient

beverage choice. Discouraging people from choosing this healthy drink option is not in the public interest.

We request that you update your online story to reflect the facts we've provided so that BBC Science Focus does not misinform its readers about bottled water's health impacts.

Sincerely,

Jill Culora

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