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Number ↓

Opinion:

The Problem with Bottled Water

by Mark Acosta

1 More than half of the people in the United States drink bottled water regularly. In general, bottled water is considered convenient because it is portable. But that convenience comes with problems and a high environmental cost. The problems include: pollution created during production and transportation of bottled water; injuries to marine life from discarded bottles; and ugly garbage dumps filled with empty bottles.

2 Plastic water bottles are typically made from crude oil. During their production, pollutants such as nickel, benzene, and ethylene oxide are released. These harm the environment and pollute the air we breathe. It takes 1.5 million barrels of oil to produce the plastic water bottles we use each year. Additionally, trucks release more pollutants and use gasoline when they transport bottled water to stores.

3 26 billion plastic bottles are made each year. That equals 30 million tons of plastic. Unfortunately, most end up in garbage dumps rather than recycling centers. It takes hundreds of years for a plastic bottle to decompose – to dissolve into the soil. The bottles that are in the garbage dumps today will be with us a long time.

*Plastic bottles*

4 Garbage dumps are often located near the ocean, and that is where many bottles wind up. In the ocean, sea turtles and other animals can mistake plastic bottles for their main food source, jellyfish. Eating plastic can injure or kill sea turtles as well as birds that feed in the ocean.

5 Across the United States, people can turn on sink faucets to get some of the cleanest, healthiest tap water on Earth. Almost all chemicals and impurities have been removed to make this drinking water clean and safe. It is also inexpensive. On average, a gallon of tap water costs a small fraction of one cent. Considering these facts, the obvious question is, “Why do Americans drink so much bottled water?”

6 Consumers in the United States feel bottled water is both safer and more convenient. The fact is that tap water is just as safe and tap water carried in a reusable container is just as convenient. Clearly, the advantages of bottled water are more imaginary than real.

7 It is time for major changes across the country. If every bottled water consumer in the U.S. made the switch to drinking tap water from reusable containers, the environment would be cleaner and safer for all living creatures. The percentage of plastic bottles that get recycled needs to rise as well. Currently only about 30 percent of plastic bottles make it to a recycling center. That means 70 percent wind up in garbage dumps!

8 It is important to communicate information about this environmental issue with others. Many people are simply unaware of the harm caused by this problem and are willing to change their behavior when they find out how the environment is being affected.

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Letter from a reader:
A Reply to Mark Acosta
by Wendy Black

Dear Environment Today,

1 Recently you printed an article by Mark Acosta about all the problems that are caused by people drinking too much bottled water. I think Mr. Acosta was far too negative. Mr. Acosta makes it sound like people who use bottled water don't care about the environment. That's not true. Many people who use bottled water help protect the environment by recycling plastic bottles. The problems Mr. Acosta mentions are not as bad as he says, and there are some good reasons why people should drink bottled water.

2 First of all, many of the numbers he uses are very old. The number of plastic bottles being recycled is going up dramatically. Nearly every town in the United States has a plastic recycling program.

3 He also does not pay enough attention to the chemicals found in some tap water. The only way to avoid these chemicals is to drink bottled water.

4 Like many people, I prefer to drink bottled water. I always recycle my bottles and I care very much about the environment. Instead of switching to tap water, people just need to recycle.

-- ***Wendy Black, Cleveland, Ohio***