

I admit to being an addict. Currently I am working hard to kick my addiction, but not to one of the usual vices. I am trying to get over my addiction to bottled water.

I try so hard to be environmentally-conscious in every possible way. All my light bulbs are CFLs. I have reusable shopping bags. I'll put on a sweater before I turn up the heat. My car gets more than 30 miles to the gallon. I try so hard.

Lately I've come to the hard realization that my bottled water habit has been wreaking environmental havoc and I have stopped. Cold turkey.

I am incredibly fussy about the taste of water. When I lived at the north end of the island and had well water it tasted like I was sucking on galvanized nails. I had a delivery service bring five-gallon bottles, which are not too bad for the environment, especially since they are reused. Now that I live in the village, I strongly dislike the bouquet of chlorine. Jamestown's tap water is just fine otherwise, but that taste. Ugh! So, I had been buying cases of individual bottles of water. Each of the many bottles I consumed was manufactured from petroleum products and then hauled, using up still more petroleum products to get to their final destination. This cannot be a good thing.

According to the Earth Policy Institute, "In contrast to tap water, which is distributed through an energy-efficient infrastructure, transporting bottled water long distances involves burning massive quantities of fossil fuels. Nearly a quarter of all bottled water crosses national borders to reach consumers, transported by boat, train, and truck."



Flotsam and Jetsam

By Donna Drago

Treehugger.com (seriously, don't laugh) adds that another problem with drinking bottled water is "because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's standards for tap water are more stringent than the Food and Drug Administration's standards for bottled water, you'll be drinking water that is just as safe as, or safer than, bottled," if one makes the switch back to tap water.

The Earth Policy Institute says that Americans drank some 26 billion liters of bottled water in 2004, and the number grows each year. While we in the U.S. are the leading consumers of bottled water in the world, other nations are catching up. "Mexico has the second highest consumption, at 18 billion liters. China and Brazil follow, at close to 12 billion liters each. Ranking fifth and sixth in consumption are Italy and Germany, using just over 10 billion liters of bottled water each," the Institute says.

Water bottles are made primarily from a chemical compound known as polyethylene terephthalate or PET, which comes from crude oil. The Earth Policy Institute says to fulfill Americans' demand for bottled water "requires more than 17 million barrels of oil annually, enough to fuel more than 1 million U.S. cars for a year." Yikes!

They add, "Worldwide, some 2.7 million tons of plastic are used to bottle water each year." Those are some pretty big and pretty scary numbers!

The problems don't end with the manufacturing or transportation issues. Once the bottled water has been consumed, the bottle must be disposed of. Unfortunately, says the Container Recycling Institute, "86 percent of plastic water bottles used in the United States become garbage or litter." They are not recycled. Just try to imagine the size of the pile. Someday it will look like Mt. Everest! Soon!

The Container Recycling Institute says that, "Incinerating used bottles produces toxic byproducts such as chlorine gas and ash containing heavy metals. Buried water bottles can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade." Either way, we as consumers of bottled water, are contributing to this mess.

This is how I am kicking my habit.

I purchased a pitcher-style filtration system at the supermarket. The initial cost was about \$20. These pitchers, which are found under the brand names of Brita or Pur, are easily available. The filters last a month or two depending on usage and cost about \$10 each or less if bought in a bulk package.

I was skeptical about buying the system. It seemed too simple to be effective. Convinced that the chlorine taste would remain, I was not particularly excited about this decision even though my green side insisted this was the way to go. Boy was I wrong!

The water from the pitcher tastes as good, if not better than any bottled water brand I had been buying.

There is not one trace of smell or flavor of any kind.

My thinking on bottled water has been turned around 180 degrees. I feel good about this decision as I know I am not contributing to the fuel consumption used to make and transport the water, nor am I a con-

tributor to the Mt. Everest of water bottles piling up all over the world.

For more information visit www.earth-policy.org or www.treehugger.com or <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/faq/faq.html> for information about drinking water standards.

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