

# Proctor Not Buying Bottled Water Any More

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If you happened to attend graduation at Proctor Academy this past June you may have noticed the absence of bottled water. That is simply because as an institution, Proctor Academy will not buy it anymore.

Why? The student body called the question last year of why should we drink bottled water here in New Hampshire? This launched a year-long investigation that transformed into a full-throttle campaign to cut bottled water from campus events, functions, and daily activities.

The Proctor Environmental Action club (PEA) investigated why people drink bottled water. The club, one of the largest on campus, broke into working groups to investigate the complicated life cycle of water extraction, bottling, packaging, distribution, consumption, and disposal of the typical water bottle brand.

When they compared the life cycle findings on bottled water with tap water, the differences were startling. Tap water is generally localized, whereas the average distance bottled water travels (from bottling plant to the shelf) is about 150 miles, which is equivalent to 3,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per shipment.

Tap water typically consumes little to no fossil fuels to get to your faucet (usually several pump houses). Bottled water requires extraction, production, and disposal of plastic bottles (a petroleum product), whereas tap water requires no bottling.

Also plastics are getting some serious scrutiny due to suspected leaching of toxins that act like estrogen (a female hormone) and can disrupt hormone production. In particular, studies on one toxin, Bisphenol A, are showing clear links to cancer.

Finally, the students analyzed the cost. Tap water costs roughly \$4.50 per 1,000 gallons, or roughly a half a cent per gallon, to treat and pump to users. Bottled water costs \$1.29 for 16 ounces

or \$1.59 for a gallon of Poland Springs water.

So why do people buy bottled water? Student research revealed that people purchase bottled water because of taste, health, and/or convenience. So the working groups investigated if bottled water was in fact tastier, healthier, or more convenient than water drawn from the tap.

Students discovered that, according to several studies, the water inside Dasani brand water bottles is no different than the tap water. So why buy tap water pre-packaged from another place? Is it for the taste? Many feel that bottled water tastes better than tap water. But when Good Morning America ran a blind taste test of water, they



discovered that New York City tap water tasted better than Evian, Poland Springs, and Life-O2 superoxygenated water.

So the PEA students decided to perform their own blind taste test. The results were that 4 out of 34 taste testers preferred bottled water, the other 30 gave tap water the thumbs up. So maybe taste isn't the reason for bottled water.

Many people feel that tap water is dirty or unclear. Is this a perception created by the market or the science? Water health is determined by a number of different tests. Tap water and municipal water are regularly tested and monitored for containments and other factors. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services and the US Environmental Protec-

tion Agency (EPA) are agencies that set those regulatory standards.

But what about bottled water? Believe it or not, the EPA doesn't regulate bottled water – the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does. When students reviewed the FDA standards and tests for bottled water, they discovered that they are not as strict as the EPA tests.

To be specific, the FDA performs annual tests while the EPA requires weekly and daily tests. Basically, the bottled water that you paid \$1.29 for has not gone through the same rigors to eliminate microbes and other water containments as your tap water.

So which one is cleaner and healthier? The good news is that many studies state that 40% of all bottled water comes from a tap water source anyway. However, this can be bad because we are paying for tap water – of which you have already paid for through your taxes. Why pay twice?

Many students and adults like the convenience of bottled water. However many more adults and students tote a refillable water bottle. Is buying water as convenient as refilling a bottle? This comes down to individual choice. But refilling a bottle does save money and reduces pollution.

With 40% of the major bottled water brands actually using tap water as their source, it makes you wonder why more of us don't drink from the tap. Obviously not all water sources are deliciously equal. If you have been to Florida and tried the tap water there, you know what bad tap water tastes like.

New Hampshire has very good and clean water. Let's consider Andover's source – Bradley Lake. A pristine forested landscape dresses the watershed and helps in managing a clean water reservoir. Treatment and testing of the water is done often and rigorously. However, tastes alter from building to building based on the piping. Some New Hampshire folks draw from underground sources.

Whether it is a reservoir or ground water, each has the potential to taste horrible. So is bottled water a better choice? Students did a cost analysis of bottled water versus filtration and found that filtering water made better economic sense. Why? Less waste.

Filtration units last for months, whereas #1 PET plastic bottles last a day at best. Plastics are recyclable, but only about 12 to 20 percent of all plastic is actually recycled. The rest we inhale. Yep – once it lands in the trash it eventually goes up in smoke at the incinerator. Although the smokestacks have scrubbers, the EPA allows some trace amounts to be released every day.

### Solutions

After the year-long investigation, the students wanted to not only present

their findings but offer solutions as well. The students created posters to increase awareness and had assembly presentations to empower change. The students sold Siggs water bottles and managed water cooler stations for the Spring Parents Weekend and graduation.

PEA drafted a document on their findings to push for a cultural shift on campus. The result was a "Declaration of Bottled Water Independence." This declaration stated the costly nature of consuming bottled water and asked the school to cease and desist

### Saying "No" To Bottled Water By Proctor Environmental Action students

- 1) Reduce your consumption of bottled water.
- 2) Use your local resource – its essentially free and monitored well.
- 3) If you can't stand the taste of tap water – buy a filter. It will generate less waste and have less pollution.
- 4) Reuse and refill your own container. Carrying around a refillable bottle or mug can be hard but in the long run you'll save money and resources.
- 5) Think beyond plastic for there is lots of evidence that plastics release chemicals that act like hormones in the body.

with the purchase and sale of bottled water on campus. They presented the pledge to the head of school, Mike Henriques. His reaction was positive and supportive.

"The work the students did was tremendously heartening. It felt to me like the work PEA had done was seeping down to the student body," he said. Henriques, as well as many of the faculty and staff, transformed the findings into action.

"When comes from the student body, it has real traction. Reducing our use of bottled water is the direction we all need to go in. It makes sense," said Henriques. "Part of our mission statement is to graduate college-bound students that go on with their lives to demonstrate honesty, compassion, respect, and responsibility. It is our responsibility to educate students to make wise choices that support sustainability and not the short view of convenience."

The last few cases of bottled water will be used up in the next two months. The policy bans sale and purchase of bottled water institutionally, but it does not restrict the student or staff member from making a choice. The policy demonstrates the philosophy that schools should serve as places that teach and demonstrate ways to solve problems. Proctor's virtual ban also demonstrates the ethic of the school, in hopes that it will empower wise decisions of the individual.



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