



think: Fact Sheet

Bottled Versus Tap Water



Where does bottled water come from?

Those beautiful mountain illustrations on water bottles are often very far from the true source of the water inside. Bottled water sources can be hard to track down, as bottled water manufacturers are not required to disclose where the water comes from or for that matter, what's in their water. In fact, the best indicator of what kind of water is in the bottle is from the terms used to describe it. Artesian, ground, spring or well water was taken from an underground aquifer and may or may not have been further treated. Purified water often means that the water is minimally treated tap water. Seltzer, tonic and sparkling waters, meanwhile, are considered soft drinks and not regulated as bottled water.

Is bottled water really safer than tap water?

The advantages of bottled water are consistent taste and implied safety over treated and untreated tap water. But bottled water is often no safer or better tasting than treated tap water—in fact, 25 percent of all bottled water is actually just repackaged tap water. And in one test of more than 1,000 bottles of water, 22 percent of the water tested contained man-made chemicals, bacteria and arsenic. Differences in regulation between bottled and untreated tap water tell the rest of the story. The Environmental Protection Agency regulates all municipally supplied water, devoting more than 350 employees to the task. Bottled water, on the other hand, is considered a food product and is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration—which estimates it only has the equivalent of less than one employee regulating and enforcing bottled water standards.

What are the costs of bottled water?

Bottled water sales are second only to soda in beverage sales in the United States. The average American drinks approximately 24 gallons of bottled water annually. Bottled water sales are \$10 billion in the United States and \$46 billion worldwide. The cost of the actual water sold in a bottle can be as little as a fraction of a cent. In fact, bottled water costs 250 to 1,000 times the cost of tap water—a high price for something that offers no added safety. The rest of the price to consumers goes toward bottling, shipping, marketing and other expenses—including a 25 to 30 percent profit for the manufacturer. In addition, the large amount of petroleum products consumed in the creation and transportation of bottled water by cars, trains, planes and boats has a growing adverse impact on global resources.

