

burden is yours to determine if your water is safe to drink. If your well or spring is contaminated, bottled water is a good alternative.

The preference for bottled water over local tapwater is based most commonly on aesthetic considerations of taste and odor. Depending on the geographical and physical location of your source of drinking water, and on the specific treatment methods used by your local water supplier, tapwater can have a taste and odor that is disagreeable—even though it may be perfectly safe to drink. As a consumer, the choice is yours.

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### Helpful Hints

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- If you receive your drinking water from a public water system, check on the supply's quality with State or local health officials or the local water utility itself. Water suppliers will send you a list that shows what they have monitored in the drinking water supply and either the supplier, the State or local officials, or the Safe Drinking Water Hotline (see below) will help you understand the various numbers and levels indicated on the printout.
- If you are concerned about your private well or spring, have the water tested by a laboratory that is certified for drinking water testing. Try to identify which contaminants you want to test for, because unnecessary testing may be quite expensive. In most cases, the local health department will test for bacteria and they may also advise you on which other contaminants to test for. Information about certified labs and advice about what to look for in your situation can be obtained from your State drinking water program (which is usually part of the State health department or environmental agency), or by calling the Safe Drinking Water Hotline.

- If you are interested in the quality of a specific brand of bottled water, you should contact the bottler directly. Bottlers can provide information on the required chemical analysis.

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### For More Information

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For more information about bottled water regulations contact:

**U.S. Food and Drug Administration**  
Federal Office Building #9 Room 5807  
200 C Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20004  
(202) 485-0023

For more information about bottled water regulations and/or the bottled water industry contact:

**International Bottled Water Association**  
113 North Henry Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(703) 683-5213

To get a copy or more information on the federal drinking water standards, write:

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**  
Office of Drinking Water (WH-550A)  
401 M Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20460

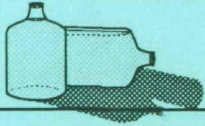
Or call: The Safe Drinking Water Hotline  
(800) 426-4791 or (202) 382-5533  
The Hotline operates from 8:30 AM to 4:30

## EPA Bottled Water:

## Helpful Facts and Information



## Bottled Water



Many of us are worried about the environment. Global warming, acid rain, groundwater contamination, overcrowded landfills, and other issues have focused new light on the quality of life we enjoy in this country.

Due in part to these growing environmental concerns and, perhaps, in part to an emerging trend, an increasing number of American consumers have turned to bottled water as their primary source of drinking water.

Is this necessary? Is our drinking water so unsafe or unpalatable that we need to resort to an alternative, namely, bottled water? And is bottled water any safer?

The purpose of this pamphlet is three-fold: first, to provide basic information about bottled water; second, to help you become a better informed consumer of drinking water of *any kind*; and third, to provide helpful references for obtaining more information.

*Please Note: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does not directly regulate the manufacture, distribution, or use of bottled water. (EPA develops and oversees the implementation and enforcement of regulations for drinking water provided by public water systems). However, EPA has received numerous inquiries about bottled water and feels it is appropriate to respond to the public's requests for information with this brochure.*

## What is Bottled Water?

Bottled water is defined as water that is sealed in food grade bottles and intended for human consumption. There are several types of bottled water, depending on the source of the water. These types are split into two, distinct groups—mineral water and drinking water.

*Mineral* waters are most often sparkling (carbonated) and are generally used as an alternative to soft drinks or cocktails. Bottled *drinking* water is consumed as an alternative to tapwater, and is also used for cooking, making coffee or tea, etc.

## Where Does the Water Come From?

Bottled water is obtained from a variety of sources, including springs, artesian wells, drilled wells, and public water supplies.

## How Is Bottled Water Regulated?

Bottled water is regulated as a "food" by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). FDA requires that bottled water products be clean and safe for human consumption, that they are processed and distributed under sanitary conditions, and that they are produced in compliance with FDA Good Manufacturing Practices.

In contrast, drinking water from a public water system (household tapwater, water fountains, etc.) is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In concert with the respective state regulatory agencies, EPA develops and enforces drinking water quality standards that are designed to assure the safety of public drinking water. Further, in keeping with a 1978 agreement between FDA and EPA, the FDA adopts EPA public drinking water standards as part of the quality standards for bottled water.

To assure the safety of bottled water, FDA has developed standards that set a minimal acceptable level of quality. The quality standards address substances in the water that may be harmful to health, as well as substances that affect the smell, color, and taste of water. The quality standards also require public notification whenever the microbiological, physical, chemical, or radiological quality of bottled water falls below standard.

Domestic bottled water producers that sell their products in other states (interstate commerce) are subject to periodic, unannounced inspections by FDA. Upon inspection, the producers must be in compliance with all aspects of the Quality Standards and Good Manufacturing Practices for bottled water, the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act, and all other applicable regulations that are incorporated in the FDA quality standards. Domestic bottled water producers are subject to inspection by state health officials and must comply with all applicable state laws and regulations. Some states (e.g. California, Pennsylvania, and Florida) have adopted regulations that are stricter than federal requirements.



The bottled water industry has a comprehensive program of self-regulation. For example, bottled water producers who are members of the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) are inspected annually by an independent laboratory, the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF). Through the unannounced NSF inspection, IBWA members are evaluated on their compliance with both the association's performance requirements and the FDA regulations.

## Is Bottled Water Safer Than Tapwater?

If both the public water system and the bottled water producer are in full compliance with their respective regulations, then either source of water will be suitable for drinking.

Bottled water is appropriate for protection of public health in two cases: (1) when contaminants in the local water supply exceed the health based drinking water standards; or (2) when a unique problem such as corrosion of household plumbing causes lead and/or copper to enter the drinking water. If your drinking water violates federal standards, your local water supplier is required to notify you and inform you whether you need to obtain an alternative source of drinking water. If you suspect that you may have a problem with lead or copper, have your water tested by a laboratory certified for drinking water testing.

In some instances, if a local water supply has been contaminated and another source is not readily available, the local water supplier may distribute bottled water to its customers until the problem has been remedied.

If you obtain your drinking water from a private, household well, you are not regulated by the same federal drinking water standards as a public water system. As a result, the