

The New Colonist  
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Dear Mayor:

Recently, Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco signed an order banning the use of city funds to purchase bottled water for use by city employees. This followed Los Angeles, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's similar order from 2005. The primary rationale in both cases was financial--San Francisco was spending \$500,000 per year on bottled water, while Los Angeles had been spending about \$90,000 per year, expensive for a commodity that's readily available from every tap in town. Other cities trying to convince residents to save money by turning on the tap include Salt Lake City, Minneapolis and New York City.

We urge you to follow suit in your own city, not just to save the taxpayers' money, but because there are several other compelling reasons to ban the purchase of bottled water for city employee use:

- Bottled water, whether purchased in individual servings of 500ml to 1.5 liters, or in commercial deliveries of five gallon bottles fitted to onsite dispensers, invariably comes in plastic containers. All but one of the plastics commonly employed in making them leach harmful chemicals into the water they contain.
- Plastic water bottles are made of petroleum, which is in short supply and becoming rarer; the fabrication of these bottles also causes harmful emissions at the factories.
- Though they are recyclable, the individual size bottles are commonly thrown into regular garbage receptacles and end up in expensive landfills, where they also continue to leach chemicals that pollute groundwater.
- The transportation of all these tens of thousands of personal servings of water, and the thousands of deliveries of five-gallon refills for dispensers, creates traffic congestion and (as water is an extremely heavy commodity) wastes a great deal of truck fuel, causing needless air pollution and depletion of our shrinking fossil fuel supply.
- Bottled water may not be better. In fact, studies have found some bottled waters have elevated bacteria levels or chemical imbalances. In 1999, the environmental group Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) studied 103 brands of bottled water and determined that one-third failed to comply with industry-set standards. Likewise a study by Case Western Reserve University studies 57 water samples finding that 15 had significantly higher bacteria levels than the tap water. In these 15, the bacteria counts were more than twice as high as the most contaminated tap water sample and almost 2,000 times higher than the purest tap water sample.

- While it is common for bottled water to be marketed as a safer alternative to tap water, the EPA has openly expressed its reservations: "Bottled water is not necessarily safer than your tap water. EPA sets standards for tap water provided by public water systems; the Food and Drug Administration sets bottled water standards based on EPA's tap water standards.

Cities already spend millions ensuring that tap water is safe, pleasant-tasting, and delivered through efficient underground piping systems at almost no environmental or transport cost. Forgoing bottled water is a testament to the quality of water from municipal sources.

Please consider stepping ahead and following the lead of the mayors of California's two greatest cities and ban the purchase of bottled water for government use. The future will thank you for it, and so will your taxpayers.

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