

CURBING OUR ADDICTION TO WATER BOTTLES

COMPANIES WORK TOGETHER TO CRUSH DISPOSABLE WATER BOTTLES

BY BARBI WALKER-WALSH

WE'RE DROWNING OUR ENVIRONMENT IN BOTTLED WATER

After decades of education, public awareness, and countless efforts by major conservation groups, plastic continues polluting the environment at an alarming rate, with plastic single-use bottles among the primary contributors.

According to an article in *The Guardian*, in 2016 there were 480 billion single-use plastic beverage bottles bought worldwide, and by 2021 that number will reach nearly 600 billion. And while most plastic bottles made from polyethylene terephthalates (PET) are recyclable, it is estimated that nearly 90 percent will end up in landfills.

Plastic is everywhere, including every square mile in the ocean. The main culprits: plastic bottles and bags. "Given projected growth in production, in a business-as-usual scenario, by 2050, oceans could contain more plastics than fish [by weight]," points out the study "The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking The Future Of Plastics & Catalysing Action."

When plastic bottles degrade, large pieces break down into microplastics. These tiny plastic particles are found in our water and in the air we breathe. In fact, Ghent University researchers recently found that Europeans could be consuming as much as 11,000 microplastics annually via their seafood.

BOTTLED WATER - A NEW KIND OF POISON

A study by the State University of New York Fredonia tested 259 water bottles from 11 brands sold worldwide, including the United States, and found that 93 percent of those tested contained microplastic contamination, double the plastic contamination found in regular tap water.

PET bottles often contain BPA and phthalates, which have been linked to numerous harmful health factors, including cancer. In some ways, bottled water is the cigarette of our times, says Rich Razgaitis, CEO and co-founder of FloWater.

Distrust of local tap water is what keeps some lugging containers of bottled water from the store to home, but as more studies show, that's an exercise in futility. By drinking bottled water, we're drinking precisely what we were trying to avoid in the first place and paying extra to do so.

A large portion of bottled water, possibly as much as 40 percent is really municipal water, says Graham Symmonds, a water utility expert and co-author of *The Smart Grid For Water: How Data Will Save Our Water And Your Utility*. "That means that the industry is relying on our municipalities to do their job of supplying clean, safe, reliable water for them to repackage," Symmonds says.

Symmonds points out that bottled water is a convenience item, easy to get, easy to take along, but it's also expensive for what you get. Taste is another reason. How water tastes is subjective, but healthy or not, Americans have grown accustomed to the taste of filtered water.

DEATH TO THE UBIQUITOUS PLASTIC WATER BOTTLE

Distrust, habit and taste are three significant reasons why Colorado-based FloWater thinks they can disrupt this consumer behavior.

FloWater has created a new way to get back to the tap and still love the taste of your water, Razgaitis says. And it isn't just about making great-tasting water available from convenient "fill and go" stations. FloWater's goal is to reduce single-use plastic in the environment.

By working with hotels, schools, corporations and retail outlets, including locally with the Arizona Biltmore, Lululemon at Biltmore Fashion Park, and The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, and Baumen's X-treme Fitness, FloWater and their partners are reducing the use of single-use plastic bottles, and water cooler bottles, which take extra resources to transport.

FloWater Refill Stations connect directly to any potable water source and use a seven-step approach to remove up to 99 percent of impurities. Then, it adds in trace elements of minerals and electrolytes, and finishes off by running it through a coconut carbon fiber, giving it what Razgaitis says is the fresh, crisp, delicious taste – one that Razgaitis is confident customers will prefer over plastic bottled water.

The company recently hit the 50 million mark on plastic water bottles eliminated from the market, and according to company documents, is on track to hit a billion by 2022.

Individual action certainly helps, but what is really needed is for companies to give consumers more choices for plastic-free products and refillable options. "We need to change the structure of our commerce to protect our marine health and our own life," said Jacqueline Savitz, chief policy officer of North America for Oceana, to CNN.

With local companies and FloWater partnering up, maybe we can save the planet from choking on plastic.

Barbi Walker-Walsh is a freelance journalist and veteran flight attendant with a serious case of wanderlust. When she's not globetrotting her family around the world, she can be found geeking out over food, fitness and fashion at home.