

Currents

food&waterwatch

News from Food & Water Watch's Water for All Campaign

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Take Back the Tap

Our new report, "Take Back the Tap – Why Choosing Tap Water over Bottled Water is Better for Your Health, Your Pocketbook, and the Environment," has made a splash across the country. The report pointed out that bottled water generally is no cleaner, safer, or healthier than tap water. In fact, the federal government requires far more rigorous and frequent safety testing and monitoring of municipal drinking water. Rather than buying into this myth of purity in a bottle, consumers should drink from the tap.

Citizens groups released the report ten communities across the country, from Wisconsin Dells, WI to Mecosta, MI.

In San Francisco, CA, where Mayor Gavin Newsom recently cancelled the city's bottled water contracts, Food & Water Watch, Clean Water Action and the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission released the report in a press conference on the steps of city hall.

In Atlanta, GA, State Senator Nan Grogan Orrock spoke at our press conference that was joined by a statement from David Kyler, director of Georgia's Center for a Sustainable Coast.

"We are trying to get the word out so that people can begin to make well-informed decisions which will help preserve and protect our environment," said Debra Anderson of the McCloud Watershed Council, who released the report in McCloud, CA.



Food & Water Watch organizers Adam Scow and Noelle Ferdon release the new report, *Take Back the Tap*, on the steps of San Francisco City Hall. Recognizing San Francisco's high quality tap water, the city's mayor recently ended the use of city funds to purchase bottled water. Photo courtesy SFist.com.

Jon Groveman, Water Program Director for the Vermont Natural Resources Council stated, "As this report makes so clear, bottled water isn't all it's cracked up to be. The report's research and analysis reinforce our belief that there are many reasons why people should drink tap water instead of commercial bottled water, not the least of which is a concern for natural resources."

But regular readers of *Currents* know that just kicking the bottle in favor of the tap is not enough. Our nation's public water and sewer infrastructure is old and in the coming years will need billions of dollars of investment to maintain and further improve treatment, storage, and distribution. Each year we fall more than \$20 billion short of what is needed to maintain our public water and sewage systems.

According to Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch, "It's time for Congress to establish a clean water trust fund that would give communities the financial help they need to invest in healthy and safe drinking water for every American and for future generations."

Take Back the Tap is still being covered in the press, most notably on the front page of the *Washington Post's* food section on July 11.

Among the facts highlighted in *Take Back the Tap*:

- Bottled water costs hundreds or thousands of times more than tap water. Compare \$0.002 per gallon for most tap water to a range of \$0.89 to \$8.26 per gallon for bottled waters.
- The Food and Drug Administration regulates only the 30 to 40 percent of bottled water sold across state lines.
- The Environmental Protection Agency requires up to several hundred water tests per month by utility companies while the FDA requires only one water test per week by bottling companies.
- Nearly 40 percent of bottled water is simply filtered or treated tap water.
- U.S. plastic bottle production requires more than 1.5 million barrels of oil annually, enough to fuel 100,000 cars.
- About 86 percent of the empty plastic water bottles in the United States land in the garbage instead of being recycled.

Right to Water Key Theme at U.S. Social Forum

The first ever U.S. Social Forum, held last month in Atlanta, Georgia, brought together social justice organizations, activists, educators, artists and students to network and share skills for a better future for us all. Along with our allies, we organized more than fifteen well-attended workshops and events focused on the theme of “The Right to Water,” putting the issue at center stage among the thousands of Forum attendees.

“Some of my best experiences at the forum took place volunteering in the Right to Water tent, where I met people from all walks of life,” said Waltrina Middleton, a graduate student studying public services and non-profit management at DePaul University in Chicago. “I came back to Chicago charged and ready to work hard as a global citizen.”

We connected with many new organizations, and hundreds of people signed a petition for increased federal support of our public tap water systems. If you haven't already, you can sign the petition at www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/americaswater.

We also took advantage of being in Atlanta to release our new report, *Take Back the Tap*, in front of a beautiful fountain in downtown Atlanta. Georgia State Senator Nan Grogan Orrock spoke at our press conference, saying, “We in Atlanta know that protecting water is a public responsibility. Atlanta has taken on the important task of improving our public water and sewer systems, but Congress needs to help out to ensure that future generations of Atlantans and all Americans have access to the cleanest, safest water.”

Thanks to our members, supporters, and allies for making the water program at the U.S. Social Forum a success!



Food & Water Watch has documented the danger that funding shortfalls pose to our clean water resources in a new fact-sheet! Check out www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/americaswater/public-funding-clean-water to learn about our strained water and sewer systems, sewage overflows, human and environmental health risks, and what you can do about it.

Stockton Cancels Water Privatization

In a major victory by citizen's groups, the Stockton City Council finally decided on July 17th to abide by court rulings to dismantle their water privatization deal. The \$600 million contract was strongly opposed by community members from the outset, but the former Mayor of Stockton, Gary Podesto, pushed the deal through without citizen approval. Stockton will now return the water and sewer facilities to the public control. The deal was struck down by courts because OMI-Thames failed to do required environmental impact reviews of its projects. The private company will leave the city early next year.

Congratulations Stockton!

New California Bill Would Increase Corporate Control of Our Water

California consumers should be concerned about Assembly Bill 1261. Under the Privatization Act established in 1996, municipalities can sign contracts with water corporations for the maintenance, operation, and construction of their water and wastewater systems. However, under AB 1261 these public-private contracts would be able to extend from the current limit of 35 years to 99 years – contracts that would bind multiple generations of Californians.

Already numerous communities across the state are seeking to get their private contracts invalidated. The proposed 99-year contracts make their effort even harder and hands complete power to corporate rule of water in the state. Water corporations have already shown that they care more about the bottom line than service to customers.

AB 1261 also would exempt many public-private partnerships from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), specifically, proposed projects would not have to prepare an Environmental Impact Report. The Concerned Citizens Coalition of Stockton has won court cases to invalidate a private contract over their community's water utility on CEQA grounds. Water corporations now want their contracts insulated from environmental protection laws, at the expense of the public interest.

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