

## **Goodbye, Bottled Water?**

### **San Francisco mayor calls for change**

By Gail Hennessey July 2, 2007

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Did you know that you could be harming the environment when you drink a bottle of water? It's estimated that 30 billion single-serving bottles of water are gulped down each year in the United States. If you are like most people, you throw away that bottle when you're finished.

Mayor Gavin Newsom, of San Francisco, California, thinks it's time for a change. He has banned city government from using public money to purchase bottled water for its employees.

According to a statement from the Mayor's office, "More than 1 billion plastic water bottles end up in California's landfills each year, taking 1,000 years to biodegrade and leaking toxic additives such as **phthalates** into the groundwater."

The mayor also cites the cost of fuel to transport the bottled water as a factor in his decision.

"All of this waste and pollution are generated by a product that by objective standards is often inferior to the quality of San Francisco's pristine tap water," read Mayor Newsom's executive order.

To encourage people in San Francisco to cut down on their use of plastic water containers, residents who sign an online pledge can receive a stainless-steel recyclable container from the city.

"We must all do our part to reduce our carbon footprint and our impact on the environment," Laura Spanjian, of San Francisco Public Utilities Commission told Scholastic News Online. "This is really a movement. And San Francisco wants citizens and students in other cities to be leaders of a movement to change how people think about bottled water."

A big environmental problem, according to experts, is that people don't recycle their plastic bottles. "Only about 14 percent of single-serving plastic water bottles are recycled." Jennifer Gitlitz, research director for Container Recycling Institute (CRI) told Scholastic News Online. "Therefore, about 86 percent of the water bottles sold are wasted: landfilled, incinerated, or littered."

The CRI tracks the total number of wasted beverage cans and plastic bottles that go into U.S.

landfills every year with a minute-by-minute count. The current count for this year shows more than 64 billion wasted cans and bottles!

The International Bottled Water Association said that its organization applauds San Francisco's efforts but believes that governmental officials ought to push harder to improve recycling rates for all consumer packaging, not just plastic water bottles.

### **Return to Tap Water**

Several other mayors are focusing on a return to tap water. Last fall, Mayor Ross Anderson, of Salt Lake City, Utah, asked its 2,500 city workers to voluntarily stop buying bottled water.

"We are raising awareness [about] the serious environmental issues [related] to using bottled water," Patrick Thronson, communications director for Mayor Anderson, told Scholastic News Online.

Thronson explained that 1.5 million barrels of petroleum are used to produce plastic water bottles in the United States each year.

"That's enough to supply 250,000 homes with electricity for a year or 100,000 cars with gasoline for a year," said Thronson.

Mayor Anderson, along with two other mayors, introduced a resolution at the recent US Conference of Mayors calling for the promotion of tap water over bottled water. The resolution passed.