

Sustainability at Work

Providing free tools and expertise to achieve your goals

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Bottled vs. Tap Water

When it comes to water, the best environmental choice is to avoid single-serve bottles all together and drink water from the tap [1].

Quick links:

Reduce, reuse, recycle: water edition.

What can your workplace do to support tap water?

What about delivery service water?

Why? Disposable bottled water uses more resources than tap water and costs more money.



And, in Portland, we have great tap water!

So good in fact, that it's won "Best Tasting Water" contests [2]!

Curious about where our tap water comes from, how it's processed and how much Portlanders use? Find answers and learn more about Portland's water system (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/48904>).

Don't like the taste of your office's tap water? Could be older pipes or other causes. Get a free test kit (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/#WaterQuality>), or consider installing a filter (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/#WaterFilter>) on your tap.

Did you know? Some of Portland's water pipes generate electricity (<http://www.opb.org/news/article/portland-now-generating-hydropower-in-its-water-pipes/>)!

Reduce, reuse, recycle: water edition

1. Reduce your environmental impact by drinking from the tap instead of disposable plastic bottles.

Buying a reusable water bottle prevents the need to continue purchasing bottled water. You can even get your bottle from a local company (<http://www.portlandmonthlymag.com/health-and-fitness/the-balance/articles/3-local-bottle-companies-beg-you-to-ditch-the-plastic-may-2015>).

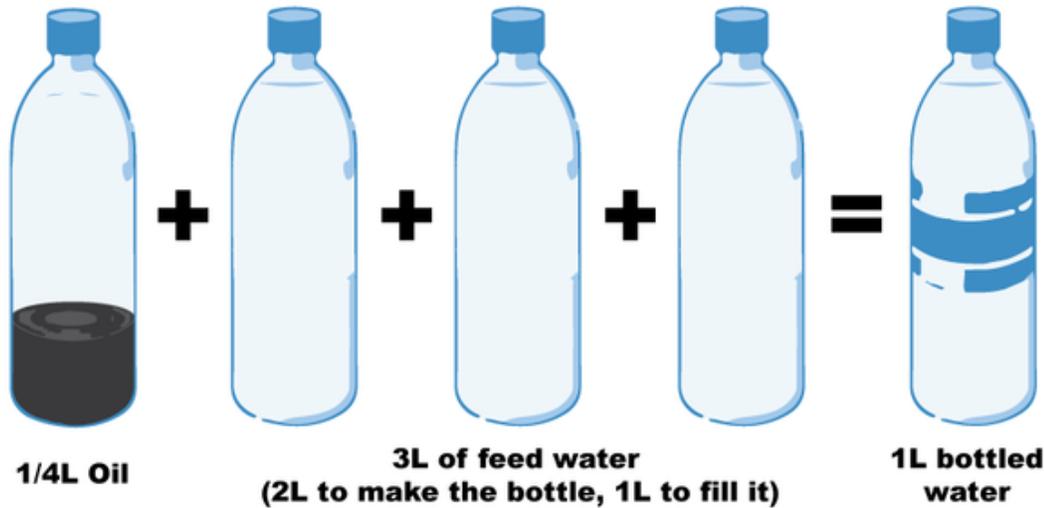
You can refill and wash your reusable bottle 5 times before the climate impact equals just one disposable bottle.



Energy - Drinking the same amount of water from the tap in a “typical” reusable bottle reduces energy consumption by 85% and greenhouse gas emissions by 79% [1]. This is true even in the worst case scenario, where the bottle is being washed frequently, in a highly inefficient dishwasher.

Oil - Disposable plastic bottles require a lot of resources for something that is only used once. If you imagine a plastic water bottle ¼ filled with oil – that’s about how much oil it takes to make each disposable bottle [4]. Oil used to produce bottled water for the U.S. is equivalent to the amount of oil that would power 1 million cars for a year [5].

Water - It’s estimated that it takes 3L of water to make 1L of bottled water – 2L to make the plastic bottle and 1L to fill it [6].



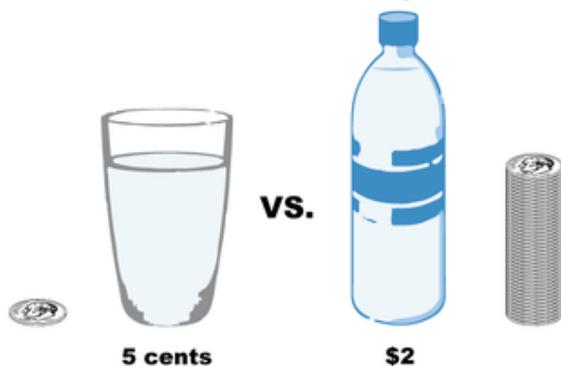
Disposable water bottles are filled and shipped all over the world. Since our local tap water is so good, there’s no need to pay the extra cost and environmental impact to ship bottled water.

2. Reuse your reusable water bottle.

Drinking tap water is great for the environment, and there are also personal benefits to using a reusable water bottle.

Save money. Bottled water can be anywhere between 240 and 10,000 times more expensive than tap water depending on the type of bottled water purchased [7]. Filling up a reusable bottle costs just a few cents, whereas bottled water are sold for anywhere between one and three dollars. A person who replaces their daily bottled water with a reusable bottle can save between \$325 and \$695 each year.

Same water. Different price.



Stay better hydrated. Carrying around water with you means you’re able to drink water whenever you’re thirsty, making you more likely to stay well hydrated.

Protect your health. Some disposable plastic bottles are made from low grade plastics that can leech hormone disrupting chemicals called phthalates into the body. However, most reusable plastic bottles are made from safer plastics that are designed not to leech and are BPA free [8].

3. Recycle disposable bottled water when you must buy bottled.

Recycling disposable bottles reduces energy consumption throughout the bottles’ life cycle by almost 25%! [9]

What can your workplace do to support tap water?



Make it easy

Provide reusable water glasses and pitchers for use during meetings.

Create a “no bottled water” policy (like Multnomah County has had since 2010).

If your company throws large events, make them bottled water free.

Consider gifting all employees a branded reusable water bottle.

Educate staff

Share stats about the costs and environmental impacts of bottled water versus tap (such as those above).

Organize a brown bag viewing of “The Story of Bottled Water.”

The Story of Bottled Water





What about delivery service water?

Much like individual water bottles, delivered water has much higher costs – environmental and monetary – than tap water.

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/> Tap water taste and quality.

If you dislike the taste of your workplace's tap water, or are worried about its quality (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/327613>), have it tested rather than make assumptions. Portland has some of the best water in the country, but the quality and taste can be affected by a number of factors.

Portland's Water Bureau will mail your business a free kit that lets you test for lead, copper and iron in your water. (Request the kit by calling 503-823-7525.) You'll have results in 4-6 weeks to both inform your decision and share with staff.

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/> Filter at your tap.

If you decide you still want or need filtered water, you have options other than having it delivered by truck. Consider installing a filter directly to your faucet or to the water line under your sink.

If you prefer having a floor or counter-top dispenser, there are models that can be plumbed directly into your building's water supply. In addition to filtering the water on site, many of these dispensers also have a hot-water feature. If you currently contract with a water delivery vendor, check with them about options for dispensers that use your tap water instead. A number of companies offer both types of service.

References:

Drinking Water: A Comparison of Bottled and Tap Water Using Life Cycle Analysis. FAQ. – Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.
Portland Wins "Best Tasting Water" Contest – Portland Water Bureau
Tap Water FAQ – Food and Water Watch
Drinking Water: Bottled or From the Tap? – National Geographic
Water Bottle Pollution Facts – Home Guides
Bottled Water and Energy Fact Sheet – The Pacific Institute.
Bottled Water Pricey in More Ways than One – Worldwatch Institute
Bottled Water – Natural Resources Defense Council
Comparing Prevention, Recycling, and Disposal. A supplement to DEQ's "Life Cycle Assessment of Drinking Water Delivery Systems: Bottled Water, Tap Water, and Home/Office Delivery Water." – Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
