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## Drinking Water: bottled doesn't mean better 9/11

(This article is adapted from the September 2011 Consumer Reports magazine.)



Sales of bottled water are on the rise in the U.S., inching up 3.5 percent in 2010 after having dropped in recent years, to \$6.4 billion a year, according to industry figures. That despite some increasingly unflattering revelations—chief among them that many brands don't even reveal where the water comes from.

### Wanted: Clearer labeling

In a report released earlier this year, the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization, analyzed the labels and company websites of 173 bottled waters and found that about

one-fifth, including big brands Aquafina and Crystal Geyser, didn't list their source. Another one-third didn't say how the water was treated.

Many popular brands, such as Poland Spring, list multiple sources (for example, springs in Maine), leaving consumers to guess which one produced their H<sub>2</sub>O. Only three brands—Gerber Pure Purified Water, Nestle Pure Life Purified Water, and Penta Ultra-Purified Water—got the group's highest marks for disclosing source and treatment information and using the most advanced treatment methods.

Some brands might not disclose their source because they don't have to. The Environmental Protection Agency requires community water systems to divulge the source of their drinking water in an annual Consumer Confidence Report (CCR). But bottled-water makers aren't required to disclose where their water comes from, how it was treated, or what contaminants it might contain. Disclosure is purely voluntary (except in California). And the bottled stuff is subject to a less stringent safety standard than tap water.

### What to do

Don't be misled by crisp blue labels and mountain vistas. Purified tap water is the source of 49 percent of bottled water produced in the U.S., according to industry data. Many consumers could cut out the middleman (and produce far less plastic waste) by investing in a water filter and reusable water bottle to tote when they're on the go.

- Drink tap water. If you're concerned about its purity, get a recommended water filter. Carafe or faucet-mounted models are the least expensive and remove many common contaminants. A reverse-osmosis filter removes more contaminants. Most cost hundreds of dollars, but *Consumer Reports* found an excellent model from Whirlpool for \$150.

- Give everyone in the household a reusable water bottle that doesn't have bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical linked to reproductive problems. Hard plastic bottles (#7 plastic) can leach the chemical into water. Carry stainless steel or other BPA-free bottles.
- If you must buy bottled water, choose a brand that discloses its source and lists an advanced purification method on its label or website. Check EWG's brand analysis at [www.ewg.org/bottled-water-2011-home](http://www.ewg.org/bottled-water-2011-home).
- To learn about your tap water, read the [Consumer Confidence Report or CCR](#) and check out the latest tests on [water filters](#). If you pay a water bill, you should be mailed a CCR annually. It can help you determine whether you need a water filter, and if so, what kind.

### Related links

What's in your water? 5/10

Watch video: Getting the right water filter.

Environmental Protection Agency: Drinking water.

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