

# Opinion: Bottled water makes less sense in a drought

By Michael Hiltzik, Los Angeles Times

As California's drought really starts to bite – the mandatory water use restrictions approved by the state last week are just the beginning – questions are bound to be raised about the indescribably wasteful use of water to retail bottlers.

The sale of bottled water to most Americans, who have access to cheap and safe tap water from municipal systems, is a marketing scam, and environmentally devastating besides. As Peter H. Gleick of the Oakland-based Pacific Institute showed in 2007, it took the equivalent of 17 million barrels of oil to produce the plastic bottles for American buyers in 2006. That would be enough to fuel 1 million American cars and light trucks for a year.

“Bottled water requires energy throughout its life cycle,” Gleick has written. “Energy is required to capture, treat, and send water to the bottling plant; fill, package, transport, and cool the bottled water; and recycle or dispose of the empty containers.”

Consider the unnecessary energy usage in shipping, say, Fiji Water to these shores from a Pacific island dictatorship 5,000 miles away, all to satisfy the marketing thirst of the product's distributors, Lynda and Stewart Resnick of Beverly Hills. And while you're cradling that shiny square bottle in your hands, keep in mind that 30 percent of Fiji's 800,000 residents don't have access to clean drinking water themselves.

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