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## News Release - FDA Should Adopt EPA Tap Water Health Goals for Bottled Water

### FDA plan won't improve testing for common bacteria in bottled water

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WASHINGTON — Bottled water costs hundreds of times more than tap water, but when it comes to consumer protections, it's no better. FDA has proposed to improve testing bottled water for bacteria. But even these new rules would leave the public in the dark, because unlike tap water, for which all test results are made public, manufacturers conceal bottled water test results from the public.

Environmental Working Group (EWG) Senior Scientist Dr. Olga Naidenko has advised the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that its Sept. 17 proposal to require more testing of bottled water for coliform bacteria "is not sufficient to guarantee bottled water quality."

Naidenko, who co-authored EWG's Bottled Water Quality Report, published Oct. 15, said FDA's proposed regulation would offer consumers limited improvements over the current situation, in which bottled water is rarely tested for purity.

The EWG study found that ten popular bottled water brands contained 38 chemical pollutants and, in four cases, bacteria, some with contaminant levels no better than tap water.

"For all the hoopla and high prices, bottled water should meet a far higher standard of purity than tap water," said Naidenko.

Scores of contaminants are allowed in tap water, not because they are safe, but because the cost of removing them is more than most municipal water treatment systems can afford. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified many of these contaminants as serious health risks and has set formal tap water health goals at zero contamination. EPA's legally enforceable standards for municipal water facilities are less protective than its health goals because the federal Safe Drinking Water Act requires EPA to balance health risks against cost and technological feasibility.

But consumers expect that when they pay premium prices for bottled water, they are buying a product that has been meticulously purified with state-of-the-art technology.

"Bottled water can easily be filtered to meet these EPA health goals, but the industry and FDA have taken the low road, opting for the maximum allowable amount of contamination in their products," Naidenko added.

The FDA proposal, published in the Federal Register on Sept. 17, contains a major loophole that would benefit the bottled water industry: bottlers would not be obligated to make public their test results, as EPA requires of municipal water treatment systems.

"Considering that bottled water is hundreds or even thousands of times more expensive than municipal water, consumers deserve much greater health protection from toxic contaminants in bottled water," Naidenko wrote.

"Water Americans drink, whether from a bottle or a faucet, should be rigorously tested to ensure both sources are as free from hazardous chemicals and bacteria as possible," said EWG Senior Scientist Renee Sharp, a co-author of EWG's Bottled Water Report.

To make bottled water truly safe, EWG urged FDA to strengthen the proposed regulation on three counts:

- FDA should adopt EPA's Maximum Contaminant Level Goals (MCLGs) as enforceable standards for chemical and microbiological contaminants in bottled water.
- FDA should require bottled water companies to disclose fully all test results to the public.
- FDA should require companies to disclose source and treatment information on bottled water labels.

EWG's comments can be seen at <http://www.ewg.org/node/27368> [1]

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