



**Polarix
Institute**



Attention: Board of Governors, [insert University/College name]

Re: Becoming a Bottled Water Free Campus

Until very recently, bottled water was the fastest growing sector of the beverage industry, outpacing the consumption of coffee, tea, apple juice and milk. This global billion dollar industry – dominated by four large multinational corporations Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestlé and Danone – continues to rely on carefully crafted marketing campaigns, designed to manipulate consumers into believing that bottled water is healthy, pure, and even environmentally friendly. The industry’s marketing strategy has resulted in undermining public confidence in tap water.

Images of pristine landscapes and snow-capped mountains on plastic water bottles and vending machines mask the real facts behind the bottled water trend. Bottled water uses vast amounts of energy and resources to produce and transport and their disposal in landfills pollutes the ground and atmosphere. Another worrisome fact is that bottled water is less stringently regulated than tap water and is up to 10,000 times more expensive. Finally, bottled water also sets the stage for the privatization of water services by cultivating a consumer willingness to pay for water. Water is a resource essential to life and a fundamental human right and should not be viewed as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit.

The consumption of bottled water is a relatively recent phenomenon. Just ten years ago most people living in Canada and the U.S. obtained their drinking water directly from the tap. Getting a drink of water at school, on campus or in many other public buildings was as simple as using a water fountain. Water fountains, however, are rapidly becoming a thing of the past on Canadian campuses. A survey released in September 2008 by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Canadian Union of Public Employees and Polarix Institute, found that 33% of respondents noticed a reduction in the number of water fountains on campus and 43% cited delays in repairing them. This raises serious questions about access to public water services on university and college campuses. It appears that water fountains are being neglected in favour of the more expensive and less sustainable sale of bottled water.

Public awareness about the environmental, health, social and economic impacts of the bottled water industry is increasing, and the momentum to move away from it and get back to publicly provided tap water is growing. Bottled water sales are beginning to reflect this and industry analysts are admitting the role of environmental campaigns on their bottom line. Restaurants, as well as labour, environmental and faith based organizations, school boards and municipalities are all part of the growing movement challenging bottled water. In December, Toronto became the largest city in the world to pass a comprehensive policy banning the sale and provision of bottled water in city owned and operated facilities and committing to accessible tap water by re-investing in public water services.

On university and college campuses, students, faculty and staff have long been engaged in awareness raising on the harmful impacts of bottled water and beverage exclusivity contracts, and the need for accessible public tap water systems on campus. Through Days of Action and mobilizing on campus, university and community spaces have been turned into bottled water free zones – where bottled water is not being purchased and alternatives such as the use of glasses, pitchers and reusable stainless steel containers for tap water are promoted or provided. There are currently over 50 bottled water free zones on 21 campuses across Canada.

Universities can play an important role and demonstrate leadership in contributing to sustainability initiatives by becoming bottled water free campuses and prioritizing safe and accessible public water systems. In November 2008, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri committed to ending the purchase and sale of bottled water on campus and removed bottled water from vending machines in January 2009. In addition, repairs were made to water fountains.

We strongly urge you to become a bottled water free campus by ending the purchase and sale of bottled water on campus. In addition we encourage you to install new water fountains and repair broken ones and commit to re-building, maintaining and upgrading water infrastructure on your campus.

Take the plunge and become a bottled water free campus.

Sincerely,

Polaris Institute
Sierra Youth Coalition
Canadian Federation of Students

And the Undersigned:

*The **Campus Bottled Water Free Zones Campaign** is a Polaris Institute initiative in collaboration with the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and the Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC). The campaign aims to challenge the corporate control of water one space at a time by raising awareness and action on the bottled water industry and calling for the rebuilding and maintaining of safe and accessible public tap water systems for all.*

***Polaris Institute** works on major public policy issues like water and develops new tools and strategies to assist social movements in fighting for democratic social change in an age of corporate driven globalization.*

*The **Sierra Youth Coalition's Sustainable Campuses** project aims to empower students to lead initiatives on their campuses toward greater social, ecological and economic sustainability through changes to campus operations, curricula and culture.*

*The **Canadian Federation of Students** represents over one half million Canadian students and provides them with an effective and united voice, provincially and nationally.*

