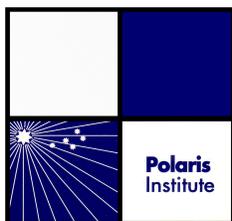


Bottled Watergate:

Why is the Federal Government spending millions of tax dollars on bottled water?



By: Polaris Institute and Canadian Union of Public Employees Nova Scotia
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Polaris Institute

The Polaris Institute is a public interest research and advocacy organization based in Canada. Since 2004 Polaris has researched the impacts of the bottled water industry and actively campaigned for municipal, provincial, federal and local bottled water restrictions. The www.insidethebottle.org campaign is a national program of the Institute. The following findings are part of a forthcoming broader piece of research on Government spending on bottled water

CUPE Nova Scotia

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) is Canada's largest union. With about 590,000 members across Canada, 16,000 in Nova Scotia, CUPE represents workers in health care, education, municipalities, libraries, universities, social services, public utilities, transportation, emergency services and airlines. A strong and democratic union, CUPE is committed to improving the quality of life for workers in Canada and for their families, friends and neighbors in the communities where they work.

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Overview

Since 2004 the Polaris Institute has researched the impacts of the bottled water industry and actively campaigned for municipal, provincial, and federal bottled water restrictions. The following findings are part of a forthcoming broader piece of research on Government spending on bottled water.

Since April 2006, the Government of Canada has spent upwards of \$7,296,738 of public money on 131 separate contracts to purchase bottled water¹. The contracts were awarded to 53 different companies providing non-alcoholic beverages described as water. In comparison, the same amount of money could have been used to pay for 2,918 indoor or 584 outdoor water fountains². In fact, \$7.2 million could have been spent to upgrade or significantly improve a water treatment plant in a First Nations community in Canada³. The use of government funds for the purchase of bottled water is particularly troubling because Canada's public water infrastructure is in dire need of re-investment.

The Government of Canada has a responsibility to provide safe drinking water in its facilities. Where potable drinking water is not available, such as during emergencies or work overseas/in remote locations, it may be necessary to provide bottled water. However, the amount of public money spent on a temporary bottled solution instead of sustainable long-term public water infrastructure raises many troubling questions:

First, the Government of Canada needs to fully disclose the exact details of the 131 contracts issued over the last three years. Second, the Government of Canada needs to disclose any additional contracts for the purchase of bottled water with public money. Third, the Government of Canada needs to disclose the amount of public money spent on providing bottled water in facilities where potable drinking water was already available.

Bottled water may serve a purpose in Canada; however, it is not a substitute for publicly delivered drinking water. It is time for the Government of Canada to explain its procurement policies for bottled water and commit to long-term solutions through the re-investment in public water infrastructure.

¹ The complete breakdown of bottled water contracts is available online at <http://www.insidethebottle.org/publications-resources> and at Contracts Canada, <http://csi.contractsCanada.gc.ca/csi/prod/en/applctrl.cfm?cmd=expdsrch&init=1&f=expertSearch>.

² Calculation utilized the City of Toronto's average costs for an indoor water fountain (\$2,500) and an outdoor water fountain (\$12,500).

³ Assembly of First Nations (AFN) estimates for the installation of water treatment plants in First Nations communities in Canada.

Findings

a) Non-Alcoholic Beverage Water Expenditures by the Government of Canada

2006 – 2009:

- 131 contracts (awarded from April 27, 2006 – March 23, 2009)
- The value of the 131 contracts totaled \$7,296,738

2008:

- Thirty six contracts valuing \$2,234,814

Federal Departments Involved:

- Correctional Services of Canada
- Courts Administration Service
- Department of National Defence
- Natural Resources Canada
- Privy Council Office
- Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC)⁴
- Veterans Affairs Canada

Provinces and Territories with Contracts⁵:

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, North West Territories, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec,

Companies listed on the Contracts Canada database as having been awarded contracts for Beverages – Non-Alcoholic described as water:

Aquaterra, Waterlife Products, The Pepsi Bottling Group, Chris Dosne Enterprises INC, Dunmore Drinking Water, Les Boissons Miami Pomor Itée, Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Culligan of Canada, Labrador Laurentienne INC, Arctic Glacier INC, DR Water Service INC, Skor Food Service Ltd, Ontario Gold Beverage Company LTD, Vitality Foodservice Canada Ltd, Praxair Distribution, Arctic Chiller Ltd, Well Masters INC, Giesebrecht's LTD, Adirondack Technologies Furniture Inc, Distribution Rondeau, Alex Coulombe LTEE, Canadian Springs, Vitality Foodservice Canada Ltd, Columbia Ice INC, Mccurdy Enterprises Limited, Pik Fast Express INC, Browning Harvey Ltd, Artesian Spring Water LTD, Shamrock Spring Water INC, Sysco Serca Foodservice Inc, Tundra Transfer LTD, Culligan of Canada, Dunmore Drinking Water, Dubé & Loiselle inc., Neptune Food Service Inc, Praxair Distribution, Sun Glow Food Service LTD, w.r.mcrac co.ltd, National Grocers Cash and Carry, Eau de Source Vita 2000 INC,

⁴ Information on which Government of Canada Departments received water contracts purchased by PWGSC is not available on the Contracts Canada Website.

⁵ This list does not include provinces where Government of Canada Departments may have received bottled water purchased by PWGSC.

Sara Lee Coffee & Tea LTD, World of Water International, Sysco Food Services of Ontario Limited, Sysco Food Services of Edmonton Limited, Refrigerative Supply, Brum's Dairy Ltd, True North Springs, Campbellford Wholesale Company, Cedar Springs Water, Jules St Pierre LTEE, Alimentation Boeuf Rouge INC

b) Comparable Infrastructure Costs

If the same amount of money (\$7,296,738) were spent by the Government of Canada on sustainable water delivery systems, here are examples of what value added investments could be obtained.

\$7,296,738 = 2,918 Indoor Water Fountains
584 Outdoor Water Fountains
Upgrade of 1 Water Treatment Plant in a First Nations Community

Methodology

In order to obtain the Government of Canada contracts the Polaris Institute searched the Contracts Canada online database. Using the following advanced search criteria the Institute was able to uncover partial details of 131 contracts⁶:

1. Commodity ID: "beverages – non alcoholic (8960)"
2. Description Box: "Water"
3. Result = 131 Contracts

Searching the Contracts Canada database yielded basic information for 131 contracts awarded over the past three years for the delivery of non alcoholic beverages described as water to various Government of Canada departments. Information regarding the specifics of these contracts is not available through the Contracts Canada database. For example, information on the specific uses for purchasing water (water coolers, single-use bottled water for public events, bottled water for areas lacking potable public drinking water, other non-alcoholic beverages) is not available from the database. In addition, information on which departments received water from the \$1.17 million in bottled water purchased by Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) over the past three years is not listed. An access to information request is required to obtain further contract details.

Research Limitations

⁶ <http://csi.contractsCanada.gc.ca/csi/prod/en/applctrl.cfm?cmd=expdsrch&init=1&f=expertSearch>

Searching the Contracts Canada database yielded basic information for 131 contracts awarded over the past three years for the delivery of water to various Government of Canada departments. However, the specific details of the contracts are not available through the Contracts Canada database, therefore leaving many questions unanswered.

The following information on the contracts is not readily available:

-The specific purpose and use of each contract. For example, was the contract for water coolers or single-use bottled water bottles?

-Were any of the contracts used for institutions that already have access to readily available and safe potable drinking water?

-Did any departments that supplied contracts, purchase bottled water for additional departments? For example, did Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) purchase bottled water on behalf of other Federal departments?

As part of a broader research project, the Polaris Institute is seeking to uncover the full details of these contracts. In collaboration with Members of Parliament and Senators, the Institute is seeking to uncover the full details of the Government bottled water purchases.

Moving Forward: The Tap Water Solution

From 2006 – 2009 the Government of Canada spent upwards of \$7,296,738 million on bottled water. Meanwhile, across Canada public water fountains are becoming noticeably absent while at the same time too many residents of Canada still do not have access to safe public drinking water.

The Government of Canada must immediately disclose the full details of the 131 contracts, provide information on any additional public money spent on bottled water, and clearly explain the amount of public money spent providing bottled water in facilities where potable tap water was already available.

Moving forward, the Government of Canada must immediately re-assess the common practice of spending public money on bottled water. Bottled water is an environmentally harmful product that is 2000 times more energy intensive than tap water⁷. Moreover, in Canada it is a largely unregulated product: between 2000 and 2008 the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) conducted 29 recalls of 49 bottled

⁷ Gleick, P.H., and Cooley, H.S (2009), *Energy Implications of Bottled Water*, *IOP Publishing* 4 (2009)

water products due to health concerns⁸ and since April 2008 only 6% of all bottled water plants in Canada were inspected by Federal regulators⁹. Given the serious environmental and health concerns, why is the Government of Canada spending millions of dollars on bottled water?

Bottled water may serve a purpose in situations where potable drinking water is not available; however, it is not a substitute for publicly delivered drinking water nor is it a long-term solution for communities and facilities in need of drinking water. The solution is the tap and the Government of Canada must stop the practice of supplying bottled water in unnecessary locations and instead re-invest in publicly delivered water infrastructure. Water fountains, accessible taps, water treatment plants – just think what the Government of Canada could do with \$7.2 million dollars!

It is time for the Government of Canada to demonstrate its commitment to drinking water by ditching the bottle and turning on the tap.

⁸ Cressy, J, and Maggio, Z (2009), *Murky Waters: The Urgent Need for Health and Environmental Regulations of the Bottled Water Industry*, *Polaris Institute Report*.

⁹ Government of Canada Response. Question on the Order Paper, #39, March 23, 2009.