

May 20th, 2008

Subject of Brief: Draft Environmental Policy 'A Greener City in the Palm of your Hands'

Section de la planification stratégique,

I am writing on behalf of the Polaris Institute in regards to the growing public controversy over the use of bottled water and the leadership role that the City of Gatineau government can play in addressing these issues.

For several years now, the Polaris Institute has been concerned with the increasing privatization of water through the rapid growth of the bottled water industry. We have done extensive research on the bottled water industry and the corresponding environmental, health, social and economic impacts of bottled water production and consumption in our society. In so doing, we have assisted communities and the general public in developing tools for awareness and action on these issues.

We believe that the City of Gatineau's draft environmental policy can be enhanced by including steps towards: i) ending the use of City funds to purchase bottled water; ii) promoting local beverage suppliers; iii) ensuring access to tap water in City spaces and running an awareness campaign that encourages the consumption of tap water over bottled water. Our interest in the project stems from our commitment to further raise awareness and encourage action towards promoting tap water consumption and limiting the unnecessary use of bottled water.

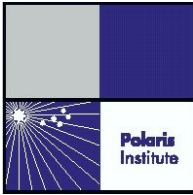
The general public is beginning to recognize the impacts of bottled water and as a result a growing movement challenging this industry has emerged. In the spirit of this movement, on June 21, 2007 the Office of the Mayor of San Francisco issued an Executive Directive prohibiting city departments and agencies from purchasing bottled water. Since then, several cities in the US, Canada and around the world, have taken similar steps by ending the use of City funds to purchase bottled water and running strong pro-tap water campaigns. In addition, many restaurants, school districts and organizations are choosing not to purchase bottled water.

The Polaris Institute's bottled water free zones campaign designates spaces that have chosen to not sell or distribute bottled water and are instead promoting the consumption of tap water. In doing so, the campaign protects the environment and supports public services 'one space at a time.' Whether it is university departments, student unions, restaurants or organizations, these zones are spreading quickly across the country.

The objectives and methods proposed under the City of Gatineau's draft policy demonstrate an understanding of the need for environmentally sustainable policies. The draft policy's water theme expresses an understanding of the importance of water as a public good and the need for: i) the protection of water sources; ii) conservation measures; iii) an investment in safe, *publicly supplied*, tap water. The draft

Institut **POLARIS** Institute

Canadian Address: 180 Metcalfe Street, Suite 500, Ottawa ON K2P 1P5 Tel: (613) 237-1717 Fax: (613) 237-3359
US Address: 231 Elm Avenue, Mill Valley, CA 94941
e-mail: polaris@polarisinstitute.org www.insidethebottle.org www.polarisinstitute.org



environmental policy demonstrates that the City of Gatineau wants to take a leadership role on water and energy related concerns. However, we believe that the draft policy needs to include a strong position against the use of bottled water.

Bottled water containers, made of plastic, are composed of natural gas and crude oil. In fact bottled water manufacturers are the end point of a supply chain that contains some of the biggest polluters on the planet – oil, petrochemical and plastics industries. Further, it is estimated that it takes twice as much water to produce bottled water than what is sold in the bottle.ⁱ

Bottled water relies on oil based transportation. Whether it is getting raw materials to the plants that produce the bottles, getting the bottles to where they are sold or from a store or fast food outlet to a home, container ships, trains, trucks and cars are used. Given that close to one fifth of North Americans rely exclusively on bottled water to meet their daily hydration needs, the bottled water industry is producing a serious amount of greenhouse gases. It has been estimated that the total amount of energy required for a bottle of water is equivalent, on average, to filling the bottle one quarter full with oil.ⁱⁱ

Once consumed, these bottles become the responsibility of Cities like Gatineau; whether they are recycled or end up in the garage or as litter. Most bottled water waste ends up in landfills. According to a report prepared for Environment and Plastics Industry Council (EPIC) by C.M. Consulting (August 2004): “In 2002, 235,086 tons of plastic bottles were generated and about 84,744 tons were recovered and recycled based on available data. This amounts to a recovery rate of 36% (for all types).”

In addition, Bottled water is not regulated to the same stringent standards as tap water. Bottled water is considered a food product under the *Food and Drugs Act and Regulations*, jointly overseen by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Health Canada. It has been estimated that bottled water plants in Canada are only government inspected on average every 3 to 5 years. Since 2000, CFIA has recalled at least 27 brands of bottled water. Only 5 of these recalls – recalled due to contamination - have been made public by the agency.

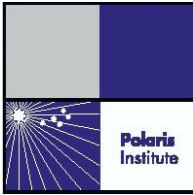
Tap water, by contrast, is regulated by *Canadian Water Quality Guidelines* which sets standards at the federal level. Tap water is tested and monitored on a regular basis: The City of Ottawa staff conduct over 125,000 tests per year, and City of Gatineau staff conduct tests 150 times per day.

The bottled water industry has worked hard to cultivate a perceived social value of bottled water as pure, healthy, safe and convenient. Millions of dollars are spent to foster this perceived value and lure people away from their reliance on low-cost, publicly provided tap water and to cultivate instead a taste for and dependence on much more expensive bottled water products. This is despite the fact that tap water is the source of close to 25% of bottled water in Canada including Coca Cola’s Dasani and PepsiCo’s Aquafina.

The bottled water industry capitalizes on and fuels public fears of tap water by using manipulative marketing. This behavior has a social impact by undermining the public’s confidence in tap water.

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When staff and visitors to Gatineau's City spaces are offered a bottle of water instead of tap water, a message is being sent that bottled water is somehow superior to water from the municipal source. This contributes to a lack of confidence by the public in your water services.

These are only a few of the many serious issues that we highlight about the bottled water industry. The Gatineau City government has an opportunity to set a precedent. End the use of City funds to purchase and distribute bottled water and work with vendors in City spaces to remove bottled water options. Instead of granting vending machine contracts to large water bottlers like Coca Cola and PepsiCo with mixed environmental and social track records internationally, choose to provide and promote locally produced beverages. This is the more environmentally friendly and sustainable choice – it also supports local businesses. Run a public awareness campaign encouraging people to have confidence in their public water services; encourage Gatineau residents to do their part in protecting the environment one glass of tap water at a time.

Ensuring that water fountains, cold water refilling stations, and water jugs are accessible in City spaces and during city meetings, makes tap water equally convenient to bottled water. These types of actions will demonstrate a commitment on behalf of the Gatineau City government to the environment and its public water services.

Taking these actions also intersects with several of the objectives outlined in the draft environmental policy. Encouraging tap water consumption should be considered an important component of increasing awareness about the responsible use of water. Bottled water is an environmentally irresponsible use of water when considering the presence of safe potable tap water in Gatineau. Under the theme of air quality, passing tap water policies can help to reduce green house gas emissions. By raising awareness of the bottle versus tap debate and limiting the distribution of bottled water in City spaces, less bottled water will be consumed. When less bottled water is consumed, greenhouse gas emissions are reduced. Installing more water fountains and cold water stations and eliminating bottled water and vending machines is an environmentally friendly method to update municipal buildings.

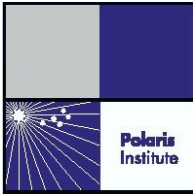
We encourage City Councillors and staff wanting more information about the impacts of the bottled water industry and consumption of bottled water to contact Polaris Institute. Our 'Inside the Bottle' website posts up-to-date articles on the industry as well as hosts our campaign tools, publications and resources. Tony Clarke's (Director of Polaris Institute) book, *'Inside the Bottle: Exposing the Bottled Water Industry'* also provides an in-depth look into the industry and is available for order online. Our bottled water free zones campaign is also featured on our website. In passing a tap water policy, we would welcome the addition of Gatineau City-owned spaces as bottled water free zones.

Sincerely,

Zoe Maggio and Andrea Harden, Water Campaigners
Polaris Institute
Tel: (613) 237-1717 x.104
email: zoe@polarisinstitute.org; andi@polarisinstitute.org

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ⁱ All of the information in this letter except for the below two footnotes has been drawn from either the *Inside the Bottle* publication or project documents.

“Bottled water and Energy: a Fact Sheet,” Pacific Institute,

http://www.pacinst.org/topics/water_and_sustainability/bottled_water/bottled_water_and_energy.html

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

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