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Reconnect with your environment

Learn about environmental issues, their affect on your community and actions for your involvement.

ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Save water, energy and plastic — use tap water in a reusable container instead of bottled water.

Tap water is better for our environment

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Replacing your bottled water with tap water will help stretch our limited resources.

Bottled water is handy in case of emergencies or even essential when disasters damage or destroy water services, leaving people without safe water. Other than that, it's better for you and the environment to ditch bottled water.

Drink tap water from a reusable glass or bottle and offer pitchers of water for group functions. If you don't like the way your tap water tastes, get a filter.

Why? Bottling water is more costly, and wasteful than using tap water and it undermines the maintenance of safe municipal water systems. Besides, there is no guarantee that bottled water is safe or that it came from mountain springs.

In addition, more water, energy and plastic are wasted for every bottle of water sold. More energy is needed to fill the bottles at the factory and move them by truck, train, ship or air to the user. Because this water is pumped far from where it is sold, it is a withdrawal that is not replaced, and it creates needless pollution as it is transported around the country and world.

The majority of plastic bottles, which are made from petroleum, go into the trash, rather than the recycling bin. Many end up as trash on beaches and waterways. Furthermore the withdrawal of large quantities of water from springs and aquifers for bottling has also depleted household wells in rural areas, damaged wetlands and degraded lakes.

Do you need any more reasons to switch to tap?

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yourspace
a place to share

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Harding Elementary students collected trash and data at their school cleanup.

Harding students learn how trash accumulates

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Led by their teachers Erin Sabol, Beth Eubank, and Asia Dickerson, 50 Harding third-grade students collected 21 pounds of trash around their school for the 2013 PA Lake Erie International Coastal Cleanup. Nine pounds were items that could be recycled.

Students share what they learned:

It's really important to recycle and throw garbage away. If you just throw it on the ground it will go down the storm drain and into the ocean. — **Evan Nadzam**

I liked the cleanup because we kept a lot of garbage out of the lake. — **Amanda Ross**

When you clean up, you are saving animals because they can die from eating plastic. — **Owen Brown**

I learned not to litter anymore because it might hurt fish and animals. — **Karnisha Williams**

We live in this world and we have the responsibility to keep it clean. Please do this and spread the word! — **Eva Theresa Chiariello**

I'm proud that I cleaned up the world. There was a lot of trash! — **Anthony Houston**

All of the garbage in the street goes into the lake, and I don't think anybody wants to swim in it. — **Emily McDowell**

I liked helping the world to be a better place. Now do your part to make a change! — **Alyssa Spencer**

I love picking up trash no matter what it is, because it helps the oceans and the whole world. — **Katherine Easly**

The trash would have gone down the drain holes and into the lake. You should start picking up trash. — **Elias Fuchs**

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ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Will there be Great Lakes water in the future? The only way to conserve and protect this important resource is to first know how much water you really use directly and indirectly. Then start making every drop count by making changes. What's your water footprint? Go to: http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/change-the-course/water-footprint-calculator/

Habits aid habitats

Your actions can help conserve water supply

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

It will take more than governors and Canadian officials to protect the Great Lakes freshwater system.

The drinking water for millions of Americans and Canadians, their property values, fisheries, marinas, tourism, shipping and hydropower are at risk. Wetlands and aquatic ecosystems are also in jeopardy because low water levels aggravate a suite of problems, including concentrated pollution and harmful algal blooms.

The Great Lakes Compact holds the states and provinces responsible for protecting the lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater that feed the lakes. It bans the diversion of water, with some limited exceptions, and sets standards for water use and conservation within the basin.

But shouldn't plummeting groundwater aquifers, documented low lake levels and water quality problems remind everyone who depends on this water to conserve it? Is your community taking the lead? What about you?

Changing our water use is the only way to ensure we don't create self-inflicted water challenges that other communities now find themselves facing. And the best group to lead this revolution is consumers, since their choices drive water consumption.

Did you know that the average American lifestyle accounts for nearly 2,000 gallons per day? Only five percent (100 gallons) runs through toilets, taps and garden hoses. Nearly 95 percent is hidden in the food we eat, the energy we use and the products and services we buy. Because much of this water is not needed for survival, minimizing both direct and indirect water use is critical.

One sure way is to insist that producers don't waste water and that they use pollution-free methods from the cradle to the grave. Another is to set the same expectations where you live, work or go to school.

Simple steps can decrease direct water use indoors and out. Take short showers, turn off the water while brushing your teeth, only run a full dishwasher, repair leaky faucets and install low-flow showerheads, toilets and other water-saving appliances, reduce or replace water-thirsty lawns with native plants and shrubs, add mulch and collect rainwater.

But minimizing energy use and altering diets and buying habits can save much more water. Using less energy will cut down on the average U.S. household indirect use of 39,829 gallons of water per month for associated electricity production. It would also lesson the consumption of large quantities of water for unconventional gas extraction. Combining errands, carpooling or taking public transportation reduces energy and water use. A gallon of gasoline takes nearly 13 gallons of water to produce. And modifying your diet could subtract water needed to support the average American diet, which is approximately 1,000 gallons per person per day.

But water conservation doesn't just mean using less water, it also means not polluting it. Walkable communities reduce pollution and energy use. Regular cleanups keep trash from entering lakes, rivers and streams. And planting trees and creating rain gardens anchor the soil and filter pollutants so they don't wash into waterways.

Which changes will you make to ensure the preservation and sustainable use of Earth's fresh water?

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ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Do you waste water by leaving the water running? Learn more about reducing water use at http://extension.psu.edu/natural-resources/water/conservation.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Slim your water footprint by eating less meat and dairy. It takes approximately 1,000 gallons of water per person per day to produce the average American diet. A vegan diet takes nearly 600 gallons of water less per day.

ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Nearly 13 gallons of water are needed to produce one gallon of gasoline. Save energy and water — drive a fuel-efficient car and when possible, park your car and bike, walk or take public transportation.

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pennsylvania DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION Coastal Resources MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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Check out these websites to learn more:

www.waterfootprint.org
http://ga.water.usgs.gov/edu/sc1.html
www.worldwater.org/data.html
www.paseagrant.org/?s=NIE

Find the Lake Erie map on the weather page. Locate and name the cities on the perimeter of the lake. How many states and how many countries rely on Lake Erie?

What are you doing to conserve water? How would your life be different without it? Write a letter for possible publication in "your space" to encourage readers to conserve water and control diversions of water from the Great Lakes. Send them to axm40@psu.edu.