

An Alternative to Bottled Water

The quality of water, the safety of water for drinking, and the tremendous increase in the availability of bottled water have all made headlines recently.

Since the 1990s, sales of bottled water have grown tremendously. A once-laughable idea—who'd pay for water when you can get it for free?—has become the second-biggest category in the beverage industry. Bottled water appeals to younger consumers. It has to do with an active lifestyle—we are mobile and out and about, so portability is important. Although the bottled water industry says its growth has not come at the expense of tap water, the amount of tap water that Americans drink has been falling.

An unintended consequence of this shift was exposed in a recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics. It revealed an increase in cavities among five-year-old and younger and connected it to snack foods and a lack of fluoride in bottled drinking water.

Village of Barrington report

Municipal water supplies are just as good as bottled water and are monitored far more closely. The Village of Barrington has just released its 2006 water quality report; it explains the efforts the village goes through on its residents' behalf. According to the village report, Barrington is complying with all Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards.

The picture painted by the report is that we have great water in our village, which is wonderful news. But we as individuals still have to do our part. No tap water is 100 percent pure, and many people have limited knowledge about what is safe water.

All water used by Barrington village residents or personal wells comes from ground water. Ground water wells typically require some type of filtration. While Barrington's water is safe, lack of filtration is the reason we all complain about its taste.

Even though a gallon of tap water costs less than a penny—up to 10,000 times less than the

equivalent gallon of bottled water—we all continue to buy bottled water for drinking.

The dilemma for all of us is, How do we provide our families and our workplaces with tap water that we prefer to drink instead bottled water?

Be an informed consumer

Many consumers have little information about the functions and limitations of home water treatment systems. As a consequence, some people buy expensive water treatment equipment they don't need to cure problems that don't exist.

If you have a well, you should have it tested by an independent laboratory. Tests for chemical contaminants range from \$20 to several hundred dollars. If you are on Barrington's water system, read the village report and ask what the results mean.

Invest time reading about water quality and health risk factors. Understand the difference between harmful contaminants and the mineral commonly found in our water supply that poses no health risks.

A worksheet for water testing

Everyone should have their water tested so that you're aware of exactly what's in it. Have your water tested by a reputable service and mark down the amount of each contaminant. That way, when you're shopping for water treatment options, you'll know better what you need.

After you've had your water tested and you know exactly what's in it, review the information you receive about the health and appearance impacts of your water contaminants. Note any special concerns.

I recommend using a worksheet I have put together to help you make intelligent and informed decisions about your water treatment equipment and how much it will cost to purchase, install, and maintain. You can download the worksheet at www.bathhaus.com. Use the worksheet to review your treatment choices and list those that might be appropriate for your particular water problems, keeping in mind that it's always wise to consult a reputable and reliable supplier.



Jay Eiring and his wife, Leslie, are the owners of Bathhaus in Barrington. Jay is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has been in the water business since 1988. He is a member of the Water Quality Association, a former member of the board of directors of the National Kitchen and Bath Association, and a founding member of the Decorative Plumbing and Hardware Association.

We all must face the fact that we need to filter our water. Either we filter our whole house or filter individual faucets (at the kitchen sink). Having this information at your fingertips will make the process of treating your water much easier.

It's important to become educated about what home water treatments can (and cannot) do so that you can evaluate what a seller is promising. Ask lots of questions and become an informed consumer! 