

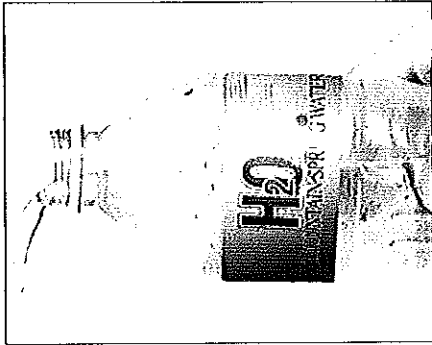
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Toledoans stock up on bottled water, but is it safer?

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BLADE MEDICAL EDITOR



The summer heat has ushered in another large green algal bloom on Lake Erie and Toledo-area residents, bound and determined not to get caught unprepared this year, cleared area store shelves of bottled water when it was announced microcystin levels increased slightly in the lake water recently.

Residents hope there is not a repeat of the water crisis that transfixed the area, Aug. 2-4, 2014, when nearly 500,000 people sought alternatives to contaminated tap water. This year, however, they are not taking any chances.

Some people never went back to drinking Toledo tap water after the crisis, but many who are skeptical of the municipal water system's ability to chemically treat and eliminate the threat of microcystin have no idea if the bottled water they are ingesting is any better.

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The sale of bottled water to U.S. consumers is big business, with total sales of more than \$13 billion in 2014. That same year, American's consumption of bottled water increased more than 7 percent over the previous year, according to the International Bottled Water Association.

Bottled water is regulated by the Federal Food and Drug Administration, the same agency that oversees companies that bottle soda and juice drinks, said Professor Patrick Lawrence, a water quality expert and chair of the department of geography and planning at the University of Toledo.

"I think bottled water is safe as any other food product. If you trust what you are drinking with Pepsi or Gatorade," Mr. Lawrence said.

It is, however, much more expensive. The price of individual bottles of water ranges up to several dollars a gallon (and more for designer brands), while water that is delivered directly from the tap cost less than a penny a gallon, according to the Earth Policy Institute.

Some people are willing to pay more for bottled water because they trust it is a better product, Mr. Lawrence said

"Is bottled water better or safer than drinking from a municipal water system like we have in Toledo? There is no assurance or guarantee it's better for you," he added.

In fact, many of the popular brands of bottled water, including Dasani, bottled by the Coca Cola Co., and Aquafina, which is a Pepsi product, consist of water taken from municipal water systems in cities across the United States, he said.

"Coke and Pepsi have distributors. They bottle all over the country. Their water is probably coming from whatever municipal source is closest to them so we don't know where it is from," Mr. Lawrence said.

Niagara, the company that bottles water for the Kroger Co., recently issued a voluntary recall in some states for its spring water. The recall, which did not include Ohio, was for spring water produced at two of Niagara's Pennsylvania plants from June 10-18, "because the operator at one of our contracted springs failed to notify us that there was evidence of E. coli bacteria at the spring source," the company said in a

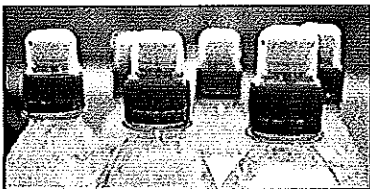
news release.

"It's like any other food product, there can be problems. A lot of these stores like Kroger and Walmart, all have other producers that bottle water for them and then they put their store label on it," Mr. Lawrence said. And it's not always clear on the label where the water originated, he said.

Mr. Lawrence is a believer in Toledo's city water. Municipal water plants are regulated by the U.S. and state environmental protection agencies, which have very stringent regulations and protocols. He has so much faith in the city water plant's ability to weed out harmful chemicals that he never stopped drinking Toledo water, even during the height of the crisis last year.

"I have no judgment of people who decided not to drink it because there was a lot of uncertainty. As we move forward, we have learned a lot and I have full confidence in the Toledo water treatment plant," he said.

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VARIOUS TYPES OF BOTTLED WATER

ARTESIAN WATER

Water from a well tapping a confined aquifer in which the water level stands at some height above the top of the aquifer.

MINERAL WATER

Water containing not less than 250 ppm total dissolved solids that originates from a geologically and physically protected underground water source. Mineral water is characterized by constant levels and relative proportions of minerals and trace elements at the source. No minerals may be added to mineral water.

PURIFIED WATER

Water that is produced by distillation, deionization, reverse osmosis or other suitable processes and that meets the definition of "purified water" in the U.S. Pharmacopoeia, 23d Revision, Jan. 1, 1995. As appropriate, also may be called "demineralized water," "deionized water," "distilled water," and "reverse osmosis water."

SPARKLING BOTTLED WATER

Water that, after treatment and possible replacement of carbon dioxide, contains the same amount of carbon dioxide that it had at emergence from the source.

SPRING WATER

Water derived from an underground formation from which water flows naturally to the surface of the earth at an identified location. Spring water may be collected at the spring or through a bore hole tapping the underground formation feeding the spring, but there are additional requirements for use of a bore hole.

U.S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION