

My Water Quality

Tens of thousands of Ontarians make their way north every week-end. Packing kids, gear and coolers, the familiar trip inevitably includes a quick stop: grab a carton of milk, a dozen eggs and, for many, a case or two of bottled water.

The much-maligned crinkly bottles make their way to cottages and chalets, century homes and condos. Purchased for one-time use, they're drained and immediately tossed. By Sunday night bins overflow, and after a long work week the story begins again. Cases upon cases of water, nearly every drop tainted with microplastics, follow the same path.

Without the encouragement of a deposit refund, every year only half of the 2 billion single-use beverage bottles sold in Ontario end up in the recycling bin. The other billion make their way to landfills—or are discarded or blown onto streets and ravines, where rain washes many of them into our waterways.

Use of disposable water bottles is completely avoidable for most Ontarians (boil orders notwithstanding). The sticker-plastered Nalgene is as ubiquitous to the outdoors as the crumbled granola bar in your day pack; sleek and shining stainless steel bottles are as accepted on the jobsite as they are in a Tesla. And a quick refill from a tap is usually just steps away. But for those who jump on the weekly single-use-bottle conveyor belt, that tap water is often the issue.

New to rural life with a well, uncomfortable with a lake-sourced pump or concerned about ancient pipes in an older house, homeowners often just aren't sure about their tap water. It kind of has a funny smell. Or maybe the colour is a little off. Sometimes it just doesn't taste like the water they're used to. Unsure of how to test the water, or fearful of the cost, disposable bottles seem an easy solution.

Tecia White, a local hydrogeologist, has a growing frustration with bottled water use, and with homeowners' assumption the water is cleaner and better than their own. "It's really about knowledge and

confidence. Once a homeowner has knowledge about their own tap water, they have the confidence to stop using bottled water," she says.

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Homeowners have long reached out to White's environmental consulting firm for water testing, but, because the company focuses on larger-scale assessments, the process could be time-consuming and expensive. Hoping to empower more residents to ditch the bottles, she streamlined the process and launched a new venture: MyWaterQuality.ca.

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