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Back2Tap offers schools reusable stainless bottles

THE CHATHAMS - 100 Million. This is the number of plastic water bottles Americans send to landfills each day. It doesn't take environmental expertise to know that this staggering amount of waste is an extremely inefficient use of earth's limited resources. It also contributes to global warming.

Chatham's Back2Tap campaign is providing the Chathams with a way of reducing this mountain of bottle trash. The Back2Tap campaign encourages everyone to drink tap water from reusable bottles rather than buying bottled water. This past fall the Recreation Department of the Chathams joined the campaign by requesting that players bring drinks in reusable containers instead of throw away plastic bottles. The Chatham schools are also spreading this important message to students.

It all started in 2007 with mothers who noticed the ugly mess of disposable water bottles left on the fields after games. They could have just addressed the littering issue, but they went deeper. They wanted to do something for the town, for the earth, and for their children's health. "When I came back to the Chatham parks and fields in the fall, I saw disposable plastic water bottles overflowing out of garbage cans everywhere. The sight of all those bottles just seemed wrong in so many ways," said Mary Lonergan, one of the Back2Tap's founders. Ann Whitman and Ellen Blazoski, two other Back2Tap team members, were also galvanized to act after learning about the huge amounts of water, petroleum, and green house gases associated with the manufacture and transport of bottled water.

As for health concerns, recent studies have shown that in some cases, tap water is actually healthier than bottled water because it is regulated by the EPA and tested more frequently than bottled water which is regulated by the FDA. Tap water is easy to filter at home for taste (go to www.nsf.org/consumer/drinking_water for more information). There are also numerous flavoring powders available at the grocery store to mix your favorite drink using tap water at home.

After much research on safety, performance, and environmental impact, team member Lydia Chambers concluded that stainless steel reusable bottles are best.

Cougar bottles for sale

To make it convenient for Chatham parents, Back2Tap is conducting a stainless steel water bottle sale this month at the schools. Bottles in 3 different sizes (12, 27 and 40 oz) with the Chatham cougar paw print will be available for order. Proceeds will go to Chatham School District PTO's to be used for the improvement of tap water dispensers or other environmental projects. More information about the bottles is available on the Environmental Commission pages of the Borough and Township websites. To place an order, please send an email to lydchambers@msn.com. The revised deadline for placing an order is March 12.

Back2Tap chose stainless steel over reusable plastic or aluminum bottles based on the criteria summarized in the following chart and explained below.

Many people feel virtuous and frugal by washing out one-time use plastic bottles (#1 or PET) and reusing them. A Canadian study found that 13% of the water bottles tested in an elementary school had bacteria levels (9% were found to have fecal coliforms) exceeding drinking water quality guidelines.

Unfortunately, children don't wash their hands thoroughly before opening them. With the narrow necks, it's virtually impossible to get them clean and dry by hand or in the dishwasher so the bacteria persist.

Alternatively, there are some great looking light-weight metal bottles that keep drinks cool and tasting fresh. The most popular aluminum bottles have very narrow necks making it difficult to clean, dry, and insert ice. Aluminum is reactive with acidic liquids so these bottles have to be lined with an enamel layer that could become a problem with wear and tear.

Another metal option, surgical-grade stainless steel, does not have any known safety issues and is non-reactive so the bottles do not have to be lined. These single layer lightweight stainless steel water bottles appear to be the best choice.

Stainless steel bottles are expensive, costing \$10-30 per bottle. If you are spending 17-75 cents per throw away bottle of water in the grocery store, it will only take between 2 weeks to 6 months to justify the cost of a bottle that will last for years.

ANY reusable bottle no matter where it comes from or what it is made of is better for the environment than the manufacturing and shipping of bottled water. Stainless steel bottles appear to have the lowest long term impact on the planet as well as being the safest health-wise and having the best performance features.

Best of all, you can fill your cool stainless steel water bottle with tap water from home, filtered if you want, knowing that you are consuming the healthiest, most cost-effective, and carbon-conscious drink under the sun.