

- Nov 17, 2010 - 1:21 PM

Bottle ban argument doesn't hold water: Nestlé

I read with interest the article written by Tina Depko that appeared in the Nov. edition of the Burlington Post, entitled, Thirsty? Try the tap.

In the piece, Ms. Depko quotes City of Burlington diversion co-ordinator Sean Kenney about a number of matters related to bottled water that require correction.

Mr. Kenney states that Burlington's decision to ban the sale of bottled water in its facilities will divert thousands of single-use water bottles from landfill and reduce greenhouse gas emissions created through manufacturing and transporting single-use water bottles.

He further states that about 60 per cent of these bottles are being diverted from landfill. Beyond the fact that Stewardship Ontario reports that the diversion rate in Halton Region for plastic beverage containers is about 82 per cent, a 2009 City of Vancouver report put this entire matter in proper perspective when staff there wrote that, "The environmental costs of bottled water include the effects of bulk water removal, the life cycle of the bottles and greenhouse gas emissions associated with the transportation of the beverage. With the exception of bulk water removal, these costs are associated with any packaged beverage. The availability of bottled water in civic facilities is limited and represents only a tiny fraction of the market. It is unlikely that its elimination will have a significant impact in terms of reducing solid waste and greenhouse gases."

Mr. Kenney's lament that the diversion rate for plastic water bottles is less than 10 per cent in city facilities could have been dealt with at no cost to Burlington taxpayers had council accepted the Canadian beverage industry's offer last year to host a pilot public spaces recycling program. Similar industry-led pilots in Manitoba, Quebec, Sarnia, Niagara Region and Halifax have yielded diversion rates well above 80 per cent, on average, and as high as 97 per cent.

Mr. Kenney's statement that bans on bottled water are "happening all over the place" is incorrect.

Burlington is among just 25 municipalities in Canada that have banned the sale of bottled water in their facilities over the last five years. Over the last three years, 102 local governments across the country have formally rejected resolutions to ban the sale of bottled water in their facilities. Most telling, however, is the fact that several thousand local jurisdictions across Canada have determined that there are more important matters to attend to than considering bans on bottled water, like repairing aging water and sewer infrastructure, maintaining and/or improving local service delivery and keeping taxes low.

Most astonishing is Mr. Kenney's statement that, "At Beachway Park, we're still going to sell bottled water because people do need to drink water, especially in hot weather."

On this point, we agree. But it begs the question, don't Burlington residents need to drink water at any other city facilities, especially in hot weather?

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Editor's note: The Polaris Institute in Ottawa told the Post Tuesday that there are 81 municipalities in Canada that have banned the sale of bottled water at their facilities.