

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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## **“Bottled Water” by Gary Lund, City of Norfolk Solid Waste Manager**

They fill your cup holders, crowd your refrigerator contents and roll around on the floor of your car. Bottles of water are popular purchases because of their convenience, cost and health benefits. As the Solid Waste Manager for the City of Norfolk, I would like you to consider the environmental consequences of using bottled water.



Empty plastic water bottles are filling our landfills. It's been estimated that Americans use 29 billion water bottles a year. Where do all the empties go? Very few of them are recycled. Instead most end up in landfills where it may take them more than 1000 years to decompose. Out of sight, out of mind, but the empty bottles have to end up somewhere, whether it be in a roadside ditch or part of a growing landfill.

Environmentally, we need to realize that a lot of energy and fuel is used to get bottled water into the cup holder of your car. The Earth Policy Institute reports that it takes 1.5 million barrels of oil per year to produce all the water bottles that America purchases, enough to fuel 100,000 cars a year. Most of the bottles are made in China and then are shipped to countries like Fiji to be filled with water. Many of those countries are short of drinking water for their citizens and yet their water is then shipped to countries that, ironically, already have high quality clean drinking water readily available.

A Fiji water company once bragged about having better water than that in Cleveland, Ohio. The water department in Cleveland took them up on the challenge and tested both the bottled Fiji water and Cleveland tap water. The Fiji water had 6.0 parts per million of arsenic while the Cleveland tap water had none.

Not only is massive quantities of fuel and energy needed to make the bottles but also to transport them across the world. One fourth of all the bottled water we drink comes from outside the United States. This not only takes massive fuel for trucks but it also takes lots of cardboard and plastic for additional packaging.

Bottled water really isn't cheap. In fact, it's less expensive to buy fuel for your car than it is to buy that same amount of bottled water.

This summer think about some alternatives to buying bottled water. You can refill the empty water bottles you have with water from your tap. Freeze bottles half full of tap water and then fill to the top before heading to those soccer or baseball games. Use stainless steel bottles that you can use over and over.

As responsible citizens we need to take a serious look at our bottled water purchases. Though that small clear bottle of water may seem a healthy inexpensive choice, it actually contributes to a unnecessary growing waste problem in America.