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Agriculture and Natural Resources



Prepared by: Cathi Lamp

BOTTLED WATER REGULATIONS

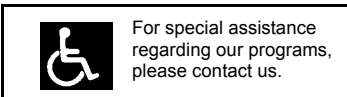
Bottled water is becoming more popular each year including during the holiday season. According to the Beverage Marketing Corp, total U.S. bottled water sales have grown from 6 percent to more than 13 percent per year in the last five years. With the growth in popularity, questions arise as to who regulates bottled water and how.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates bottled water. Tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The FDA considers bottled water a food. Regulations require bottled water to be processed, bottled, held and transported under sanitary conditions. The water source must be protected from contamination. Quality control tests must be conducted for bacterial and chemical safety.

Fluoride also may be added. The water may be named “bottled water,” “drinking water,” “artesian water,” “artesian well water,” “groundwater,” “mineral water,” “purified water,” “sparkling bottled water” or “spring water.” Before 1995, states that produced bottled water had their own standards of identity. Since 1995, FDA preempted these various standards with uniform standards.

The quality standards set by the FDA allow specific levels of contaminants in bottled water. These allowable contaminants include: coliforms, radiological activity, and more than 70 different chemical contaminants. Other quality standards are set for turbidity, color and flavor profiles. All bottlers are required to test for these contaminants. The FDA monitors and inspects bottled water processing plants.

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Over the years, FDA has found that these plants have good safety records. The FDA collects and analyzes samples of bottled water just like other foods.

Bottled Water Consumer Questions

The FDA receives many consumer questions on bottled water. Here are a few of those questions.

What is the shelf life of bottled water?

Bottled water should have an indefinite shelf life when made under good manufacturing practices and quality standards. It should be stored in an unopened, properly sealed container. Expiration dates are not required. Long-term storage may produce off-odors and flavors.

Are plastic containers for bottled water regulated?

The FDA regulates the plastic materials for bottles as food contact substances. These substances must be approved under FDA's food additive regulations.

Can ingredients be added to bottled water?

The only allowable added ingredients are antimicrobial agents and fluoride to still be labeled "bottled water." If other flavors or ingredients are added, the label name must include that ingredient. An example is "bottled water with raspberry flavor." The label must also have an ingredient list.

Source: Food Safety Magazine, Aug/Sept. 2002 via Kansas State University, Food Safety News, October 2002

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