

December 10, 2019

Rick Cotton, Executive Director  
The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey  
4 World Trade Center, 150 Greenwich Street  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Director Cotton:

We, the undersigned organizations, believe that The Port Authority has a tremendous opportunity to improve the environmental footprint of its airports and bus stations and we write to urge you to ban the sale of single-use plastic water bottles at all the transit facilities you operate.

Although bottled water is a necessity in some areas, the New York metropolitan area is fortunate to have some of the highest quality tap water available<sup>i</sup>, sourced from reservoirs in the Catskill Mountain watershed. Selling water in single-use plastic bottles is unnecessary and could pose a threat to the health of airport customers, as well to the health of our environment at both a local and global level.

In August of this year, San Francisco International Airport (SFO) stopped the sale of single-use plastic water bottles in all of its concessions, adding more water refilling stations to quench travelers' and employees' thirst. We urge you to follow SFO's lead and ban the sale of single-use plastic water bottles at Newark Liberty International Airport, JFK International Airport, LaGuardia Airport, Stewart International Airport and all of the bus stations under your purview as soon as possible.

The State of New York operates under an executive order which prohibits state funds from being used for the purchase of single-use plastic water bottles<sup>ii</sup>. This executive order has been a huge success - details on that state-level policy initiative are available from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

One million plastic bottles are bought around the world every minute; by 2021, more than half a trillion plastic bottles will be sold annually. At best, less than one third of these plastic bottles will be recycled, the remainder will be buried, burned, or end up in our rivers and oceans where they will persist for hundreds of years, making their way into the food chain, soil, and water. Plastic bottles and bottle caps consistently rank in the top ten most collected plastic trash items in the annual September beach cleanups conducted in more than 100 countries.

Water sold in plastic bottles is far from pure. The majority of it is simply tap water with one

unwelcome addition -- microplastic particles. A recent study<sup>iii</sup> found microplastic contamination in 93% of the globally-sourced bottled waters they tested; these levels were two times higher than those they'd previously recorded in tap water samples. Although the impact of microplastic contamination on human health is not yet well studied, scientists and medical professionals are concerned by the fact that each of us is consuming roughly a credit card's worth (five grams) of plastic particles each week, according to a recent study by the University of New Castle in Australia<sup>iv</sup>. A separate study<sup>v</sup> found that Americans eat, drink and breathe between 74,000 and 121,000 microplastic particles each year and that those who exclusively drink bottled water rather than tap water can increase their yearly microplastic intake by up to 90,000 plastic particles.

Bottled water does not make sense economically. While tap water costs less than half a penny per gallon, bottled water costs between \$0.89 to \$8.26 per gallon, costing hundreds of times more than tap water to produce. And although bottled water's appeal may hang on the idea that it tastes better than tap water, numerous blind taste tests, including several specifically conducted in New York City, have revealed that it is no more appealing (and sometimes less pleasing<sup>vi</sup>) than tap water<sup>vii</sup>.

Single-use plastic water bottles also represent a significant waste of natural resources that carries a heavy carbon footprint. The total energy required for bottled water production is as much as 2,000 times the energy needed to produce tap water and producing just one liter of water bottled in PET plastic requires three liters of water, a significant waste of resources and contribution to climate change.

Empty plastic water bottles also make up a significant amount of the waste collected in airports. By eliminating this source of single-use plastic waste, the Port Authority can reduce the amount of recycling and trash that needs to be collected by airport and bus station staff and sent off site for recycling and landfilling - another big carbon savings that may also result in a cost savings depending on the way the airports' waste management contracts are structured.

We urge you to lead on this pressing environmental and public health issue by joining SFO in banning the sale of single-use plastic water bottles at Newark, JFK, LaGuardia, Stewart airports and at bus stations without delay. Water fountains and water filling stations are a commonsense, cost-effective, healthy, and far more environmentally-friendly way to provide adequate hydration to passengers and staff in these three airports. We also urge you to work with concessions to ensure the sale of a variety of reusable water bottles at the airports.

Thank you for giving serious consideration to the plastic pollution crisis and working to ensure safe, affordable drinking water for all at our major metropolitan airports. Please contact Eve Fox

at Beyond Plastics ([evefox@bennington.edu](mailto:evefox@bennington.edu) or 845-443-6133) to schedule a time to meet about this important matter.

Sincerely,

Judith Enck, Founder, Beyond Plastics

Doug O'Malley, Director, Environment New Jersey

Blair Horner, Executive Director, New York Public Interest Research Group

Eric Goldstein, New York City Environment Director, Natural Resources Defense Council

Eric Weltman, Senior Organizer, Food & Water Action

Brian Langloss, New York Campaign Organizer, Oceana

Sarah Edwards, Executive Director, Plastic-Free Waters Partnership

Don Riepe, Director, NY Chapter American Littoral Society

Katherine Nadeau, Deputy Director, Catskill Mountainkeeper

Jeremy Cherson, Legislative Advocacy Manager, Riverkeeper

Denise Patel, U.S. Program Director, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives

Lauren Cosgrove, Senior Program Manager, National Parks Conservation Association

Dune Ives, Executive Director, Lonely Whale

Manna Jo Greene, Environmental Action Director, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc.

Caitlin Ferrante, Conservation & Development Program Director, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

Jerry Rivers, Environmental Scientist North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)

Christina Grace, CEO, Foodprint Group Inc.

Patti Wood, Executive Director, Grassroots Environmental Education

Nada Khader, Executive Director, WESPAC Foundation

Sara Gronim, Co-leader, 350Brooklyn

Mark Dunlea, Chair, Green Legal and Education Fund

Monica Rocha, Web Designer, ABC Home & Carpet

Rebecca Casstevens, Sole Proprietor, BeanCounters Unlimited

Greg Todd, Co-founder, BK Green Cart

Jennifer Scarlott, Coordinator, Bronx Climate Justice North

Debby Lee Cohen, Executive Director and Founder, Cafeteria Culture

Lynn Cole, Adjunct Lecturer, City Tech

Meredith Danberg-Ficarelli, Director, Common Ground Compost LLC

Jay Sternstein, DSA

Arianna Rizzo, 350.org

Robert Saffer, Garden Steward, Imani Community Garden

Allen Hunter, Environmental Action Group, Judson Memorial Church

Matt Malina, Director & Founder, NYC H2O

Heather Davis, Assistant Professor, The New School

Sarah Currie-Halpern, Co-Founder, Think Zero LLC  
Sarah Gallagher, President, This Week at the Markets  
Greg Todd, President, Waste Not Permaculture  
Melissa Elstein, Secretary, West 80s Neighborhood Association

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- i <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dep/water/drinking-water.page>
- ii <https://ogs.ny.gov/greeny/executive-order-18-frequently-asked-questions>
- iii <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6141690/>
- iv [https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/plastic\\_ingestion\\_web\\_spreads](https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/plastic_ingestion_web_spreads)
- v <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/acs.est.9b01517>
- vi <https://abcnews.go.com/2020/Health/story?id=728070&page=1>
- vii <https://20somethingfinance.com/bottled-water-versus-tap-water/>