

California legislation would measure how much water is bottled

SFGate, September 24, 2008

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How much of California's water is bottled? Legislation would let the public know.

California is in the midst of a drought and could be on the verge of a water crisis. The past spring was among the driest on record and experts are predicting that this upcoming winter season will be similarly dry. There have been various proposals offered to address this situation ranging from dams, canals, conservation and underground storage. While some of these proposals are highly controversial, the state should also take basic steps to understand how and where our water is being used.

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Assembly Bill 2275 is a step in that direction. The legislation requires public disclosure of the source and volume of California's water that is bottled every year. This information is crucial to help policymakers make responsible decisions about the ways in which our most precious resource should be allocated.

There are more than 100 bottled-water facilities operating in California. While each of these facilities report the amount of water extracted from groundwater sources to the state Department of Public Health, this information is neither compiled nor made available to local and state decision-makers who are responsible for water planning. This bill would allow them to have access to that information. The State Water Board, who is doing a full inventory of its water rights, is making a similar effort.

AB2275 is needed for Californians to ensure that the state's water is responsibly allocated in ways that protect our environment, economy and our quality of life. The Department of Public Health estimates that more than 1 billion gallons of bottled water are sold in California each year, and it is unknown how much of the state's water is exported in plastic bottles.

This specialty industry also pollutes our environment in several ways. First, bottled water contributes to global warming from the oil processed to create plastic bottles and truck them around the state. And most of those plastic bottles are not recycled and end up in our landfills.

Bottled water facilities near Mount Shasta have divided local communities who are concerned about corporations such as Nestle, which owns Arrowhead Water, abusing their water resources. Finally, bottled water is rarely tested and is often just filtered tap water, although it can be a thousand times more expensive.

Because of this, the California Legislature overwhelmingly passed AB2275 and the bill now awaits Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's signature. The bill is consistent with the governor's goals of making our water allocation as efficient and responsible as possible. While we may disagree on other solutions, we should all agree that more information about the way our water is used is a good thing.

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This article appeared on page B - 11 of the San Francisco Chronicle