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THERE'S A GLOBAL SIREN CALL TO DITCH THE PLASTIC WATER BOTTLE (NOT TO MENTION EVERYTHING ELSE PLASTIC). THAT'S A NOBLE GOAL—AND ONE THAT WOULD LIKELY BENEFIT OUR BIOLOGICAL, ECOLOGICAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH—BUT SINCE

### **YOU ARE WHAT YOU DRINK**

#### **WE LIVE IN A PLASTIC WORLD.**

Plastic bags, straws, plates, furniture, appliances, packaging, toys, electronics equipment . . . you name it, plastic is probably in it or encasing it. Since plastic's introduction into large-scale production in the 1950s at 2 million metric tons annually, plastic production has increased nearly 200-fold, reaching 381 million metric tonnes in 2015. And plastic water bottles make up a significant portion of these numbers.

It's hard to scroll through your newsfeed without seeing something about plastic's hazardous effects. Plastic waste overwhelming our landfills, floating plastic gyres the size of small nations invading our oceans, plastic byproducts polluting our air, plastic production squandering our natural resources, marine life ingesting plastic particles (resulting in downstream food-chain effects for humans)—this man-made substance is a large-scale environmental toxin.

# BOOTTLED UP

## BREAKING WATER FREE FROM PLASTIC

By Alison Main

While convenient and versatile, many plastics, particularly water bottles, contain chemicals such as phthalates and bisphenol A. While the FDA has declared that BPA is safe at current levels occurring in foods, many health experts and researchers cite both chemicals as potentially harmful to human hormones and reproductive systems.

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WE CAN'T ALL LIVE NEXT TO A RUNNING BROOK OF UNADULTERATED, MINERAL-RICH, MOUNTAIN SPRING WATER, HOW EXACTLY DO WE GO ABOUT KEEPING OUR MOST POTABLE BEVERAGE PORTABLE, WITHOUT ITS UBIQUITOUS PLASTIC ENCASEMENT?

These chemicals, particularly when heated, can leach from the bottle into its contents. Research shows chemicals like BPA can mimic hormones like estrogen and thereby interfere with key biochemical pathways. Classified as “endocrine disrupting chemicals,” or EDCs, these chemicals can inhibit the normal function of the thyroid and endocrine systems, act as low-level estrogens as well as androgen blockers, and affect insulin release and resistance.

Dr. Aly Cohen, rheumatologist and integrative medicine and environmental health expert in Princeton, New Jersey, and founder of [TheSmartHuman.com](http://TheSmartHuman.com) explains, “Many of the EDCs, such as BPA, work similar to the way human hormones work. A small amount has exponential physiological effects, and these effects are pervasive throughout the body at extremely low doses.” Dr. Cohen also explains that exposures are of great concern during pregnancy and with newborns. “The mother transfers her hormones to the baby during conception and breastfeeding. And in newborns, EDCs can impact bone growth, development, puberty, cognitive thinking, and thyroid function.”



So are we home-free with all those products labeled “BPA-free?” Not necessarily. With over 89,000 chemicals commercially available in the United States, and with limited to no testing done on human populations for toxicity or harm, the chemical industry is mainly unregulated. If a product causes a problem, it’s up to manufacturers to remove it from the shelves. Even though many companies have voluntarily removed BPA from their packaging, and even though the FDA banned the use of some BPA materials in baby bottles, sippy cups, and infant formula packaging in 2012, many manufacturers have simply replaced BPA with a similar chemical compound, like bisphenol S. Dr. Cohen says, “This is called a ‘regrettable substitution,’ meaning the replacement chemical could actually be worse than the original one that was removed. With current BPS testing, we’re now seeing that it may be more harmful than the BPA it was designed to replace.” Just because a product label touts itself as “BPA-free” does not mean it’s free of health-harming chemicals.

Dr. Cohen reminds us that the best way to protect our health is to choose non-plastic products. “BPA has a half-life of approximately six hours, which argues for the potential to reduce exposures and get it out of our bodies. Plastic chemicals from water bottles are one exposure that we can actually make a dent in when it comes to reducing chemical body burden.”

While many of us can set up an in-home filtration system for our tap water and tote around our liters of H<sub>2</sub>O in vibrant-colored stainless steel canisters, is there a viable commercial alternative to the mass production of water containers? Can good design and sustainable engineering solve this environmental and biological health problem?

Let’s see what a few forward-thinking companies are doing to change the way we bottle, produce, and distribute water.

### CHEW ON THIS

“It’s natural, it’s edible, it’s **Ooho!**” reads their tagline. From the innovative minds at **Skipping Rocks Lab**, a sustainable-packaging start-up based in London, comes a pioneering product using natural materials extracted from seaweed and intended to “disrupt the hydration-on-the-go market.” But can seaweed realistically replace plastic?

Co-founded by Rodrigo Garcia Gonzalez and Pierre Paslier, Skipping Rocks Lab aims to “make packaging with a shelf life that better matches our use-and-dispose consumer habits.” Ooho is their first product and is 100 percent made of seaweed and plants, making each packet fully biodegradable in a matter of weeks—not to mention edible (you can find a bunch of videos on their social media sites with wide-eyed, amused folks popping these seaweed water sachets into their mouths). Requiring significantly less CO<sub>2</sub> and energy to produce, Ooho is more environmentally friendly than a typical PET plastic bottle or cup.

Each Ooho packet contains either water or juices in one of three sizes: 20 ml, 55 ml, and 150 ml. Flavors include: Minty Fresh, Elderflower, Blackcurrant, Orange, Ginger Shots, and Hot Shots. The company’s goal is to connect with drink brands to encapsulate their beverages and work with retailers to establish an Ooho production capability in every store. They are also working on commercializing the production of Oohos for quicker production, larger quantities, and different shapes, with the ultimate vision of replacing plastic bottles for “hydration-on-the-go.” As of this article’s publication, the Ooho is not yet available on the consumer market. But it has made captivating appearances at running events and festivals, particularly in the company’s U.K. home base.

**COMPANY WEBSITE**  
[SkippingRocksLab.com](http://SkippingRocksLab.com)



PHOTO: SKIPPING ROCKS LAB

## THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

Is boxed water better? One company believes this idea so strongly that it put it in its name. **Boxed Water Is Better** aims to keep the convenience of bottled water, with an eco-friendly twist. The box is 100 percent recyclable (74 percent paper, 20 percent plastic,

6 percent aluminum) and free of BPA's and phthalates. With a focused eye toward sustainability, the company says it sources their paper from well-managed forests, which are continually being replanted to replace harvested trees, helping offset each box's carbon footprint. Perhaps the biggest environmental impact isn't the box itself but the shipping benefits. Boxes are shipped flat to regional filling locations, dramatically decreasing the space required in a truck. The company cites that they use one truck for every 26 trucks that many popular plastic-bottle companies use.

### COMPANY WEBSITE

[BoxedWaterIsBetter.com](http://BoxedWaterIsBetter.com)

Another brand utilizing a similar packaging and shipping paradigm, **JUST WATER**, can also be spotted in stores. Their bottle is 100 percent recyclable (54 percent paper, 32 percent

plant-based, 3 percent aluminum, 4 percent BPA-free protective plastic film). Also on the flat-shipping bandwagon, their "better water bottle" is manufactured and shipped as flat rolls that get folded into shape when they are filled. Their website says they can ship 1.5 million bottles in a single truck, while traditional, fully formed bottles would take 13 trucks.

### COMPANY WEBSITE

[CadenceCoDev.com/OurPackaging](http://CadenceCoDev.com/OurPackaging)



## SAFETY IN NUMBERS

In 1988, the plastics industry introduced the "Resin Identification Coding System" in an effort to provide manufacturers a nationally uniform system of plastic identification, and assist the needs of recycling programs. Health experts often reference this coding system to highlight which plastics are the "worst offenders" and which ones are just "sorta kinda ok." Here's a breakdown of what these numbers indicate:



### Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)

Typically used to make bottles for soft drinks, water, juice, mouthwash, and sports drinks as well as containers for condiments like ketchup, salad dressing, jelly, and jam.

**Potential health effects:** Studies have shown that PET can leach the toxic mineral antimony in amounts that exceed the U.S. safety guidelines when exposed to higher temperatures.



### High Density Polyethylene (HDPE)

Often used for milk, water, and juice bottles, as well as bottles for cleaning supplies and shampoo, grocery bags, and cereal box liners.

**Potential health effects:** HDPE has been shown to leach estrogenic chemicals when exposed to heat, boiling water, and sunlight.

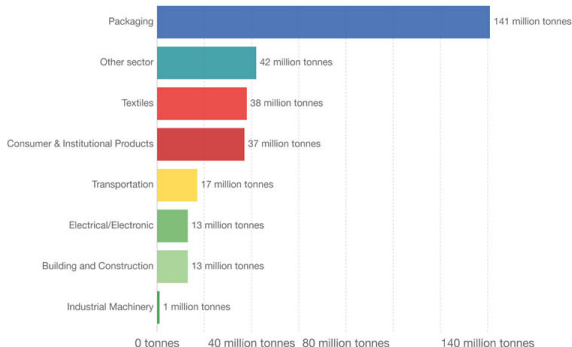


### Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)

PVC plastic can be rigid or flexible, and is commonly found in bags for bedding, shrink wrap, deli and meat wrap, plastic

## Plastic waste generation by industrial sector, 2015

Global plastic waste generation by industrial sector, measured in tonnes per year.



Courtesy of Our World in Data

WHILE CONVENIENT AND VERSATILE, MANY PLASTICS, PARTICULARLY WATER BOTTLES, CONTAIN CHEMICALS SUCH AS PHTHALATES AND BISPHENOL A. WHILE THE FDA HAS DECLARED THAT BPA IS SAFE AT CURRENT LEVELS OCCURRING IN FOODS, MANY HEALTH EXPERTS AND RESEARCHERS CITE BOTH CHEMICALS AS POTENTIALLY HARMFUL TO HUMAN HORMONES AND REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEMS.

## MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Can a water bottle do good? One UK-based company certainly hopes so. Founded by James Longcroft, **Choose Water** is an ethical bottled-water company with plans to donate 100 percent of its profits to its charity partner, Water for Africa. With an enlightened perspective on wastefulness and mindlessness, the company's mission is to promote recycling and charity by changing the way we drink—and think about—water.

The Choose Water bottle is 100 percent plastic-free, eco-friendly, and completely biodegradable and sustainable, with an aim toward zero-impact waste. The steel cap rusts down into iron oxide (a naturally occurring mineral). The outer casing is made from 100 percent recycled paper (de-inked, cleaned, dyed, and formed into the bottle casing). And the waterproof inside lining is made from 100 percent natural materials,

which the company says are beneficial to both marine and soil environments. They hope to license their bottles to other companies globally.

## COMPANY WEBSITE

[Ch2oose.co.uk](http://Ch2oose.co.uk)

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Similar to Klean Kanteens and Hydro Flasks, **Nature's Design** water bottles are not a mass production/distribution substitute for single-use plastic bottles. This company does, however, offer a unique twist on what makes a bottle—and its water contents—*naturally* healthy. Based on the principles of sacred geometry, specifically the Fibonacci sequence (aka the “golden ratio”), Nature's Design bottles and other products are designed in form and structure to revitalize your water in simplicity and harmony with nature.

toys, tablecloths, and blister packs used to store medications.

**Potential health effects:** Plasticized PVC leaches toxic chemicals when in contact with water. Chemical softeners used with PVC (known as phthalates) are known as endocrine disrupting chemicals.

### PLASTIC #4 Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE)

LDPE is used in bags for bread, newspapers, fresh produce, household garbage, and frozen foods, as well as in paper milk cartons and both hot and cold beverage cups.

**Potential health effects:** LDPE is considered a “low hazard plastic.”

### PLASTIC #5 Polypropylene (PP)

Typically used to make containers for yogurt, deli foods, medications, and takeout meals.

**Potential health effects:** PP is considered a fairly safe plastic.

### PLASTIC #6 Polystyrene (PS)

Polystyrene, also known as styrofoam, is used to make cups, plates, bowls, takeout containers, meat trays, and more.

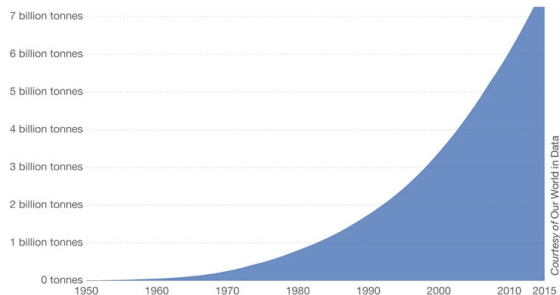
**Potential health effects:** Styrene, which U.S. government scientists say is “reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen,” can leach from polystyrene when in contact with hot beverages.

### PLASTIC #7 Other

Use of this code indicates that a package is made with a resin other than the six listed above, or is made of more than one resin in a multi-layer combination. Often contains BPA or BPS. Typically used for three- and five-gallon reusable water bottles, some citrus juice and ketchup bottles, oven-baking bags, barrier layers, and custom packaging.

**Potential health effects:** As an endocrine-disrupting chemical, BPA has been linked to hormonal changes, reproductive problems, asthma, and obesity.


Cumulative global plastics production  
Cumulative global production of plastics, measured in tonnes.



Courtesy of Our World in Data



Not to be confused with water purification, this company is focused on water *revitalization*, the process of “shifting the energetic memory of water” (whether it is purified or not) back to the state in which it’s found in nature. “Vitalized” water in its most natural form (e.g., when emerging from a spring) has a structure similar to snowflakes, with water molecules that are naturally arranged in hexagonally-clustered units. Our modern water technology (pumps, pressure, straight pipes with right angles, filters, stagnation, plastic containers, and chemical treatments) all have the effect of “un-structuring” water, breaking apart these hexagonal clusters.

According to Nature’s Design, it takes three minutes for normal tap or bottled water to restructure, or regain its vitality in a Golden Ratio product bottle, carafe, glass, or tumbler. With an expanded goal to reduce plastic bottle usage and waste, their Thank You bottle is made of 40 percent recycled white glass and 60 percent quartz sand. The protective cork sleeve is made of granulated cork bark waste, and the rubber rings are made of a natural caoutchouc (rubber) compound. The wooden cap is FSC-certified beechwood with an inner screw cap made of a wood biomass. 

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**COMPANY WEBSITE**  
**GoldenRatioProducts.com**

JUST BECAUSE A PRODUCT LABEL TOUTS ITSELF AS “BPA-FREE” DOES NOT MEAN IT’S FREE OF HEALTH-HARMING CHEMICALS.



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