

A New Dig at Bottled Water
New York Times (NY)

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October 15, 2008

It's not a great time to be in the bottled-water business.

More companies and consumers are turning back to using tap water and filters. Environmental groups have gone on the offensive against those millions of used plastic bottles. And though numbers from industry marketers are still projecting growth, independent measures suggest that the market for bottled water is nearly, well, saturated. For example, as reported yesterday, double-digit drops in sales of Aquafina and Propel waters helped dragged down quarterly earnings at PepsiCo.

On top of all this, a new report today finds a “surprising array of chemical contaminants” in 10 brands of bottled water, including byproducts of chlorination, small amounts of caffeine and acetaminophen, and fertilizer residue. The report, by the Environmental Working Group, a public-health watchdog organization based in Washington, said that contaminant levels in some water samples exceeded the industry’s own voluntary standards. Further, the group said, levels of contaminants found in bottles of Sam’s Choice water — a Wal-Mart brand — that were purchased in California exceeded that state’s standards.

Not surprisingly, the International Bottled Water Association challenged the survey’s conclusions, calling them “alarmist” and the product of “sensationalized science.” The association’s president, Joe Doss, said in a statement: “In general, the report is based on the faulty premise that if any substance is present in a bottled water product, even if it does not exceed the established regulatory limit or no standard has been set, then it’s a health concern.”

And Wal-Mart said its own studies had found no illegal levels of contaminants, according to the Associated Press.