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Bottled water contents a mystery

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IMMEDIATELY

BOTTLED WATER CONTENTS
A MYSTERY

by Sara Miller
Information Services

The labels may not tell the whole truth about the contents of bottled waters, according to Richard E. Juday, professor emeritus of chemistry at the University of Montana.

Juday has recently completed a chemical analysis of 29 bottled waters ranging from Lewistown's Big Spring water to Pennsylvania's Great Bear water to France's famous Perrier. Only two of the brands tested reported their contents on the labels, and both were wrong, according to Juday's tests. In fact, many violated standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency, the World Health Organization and individual states.

Analyses included tests for 13 individual substituents plus total dissolved solids. While substances such as calcium and magnesium are essential nutrients, they are not present in most of the waters at levels high enough to be nutritionally significant compared with levels normally found in food.

However, several bottled waters are quite high in sodium content - well above the level recommended for low-salt diets. Since most people consume 10 to 20 times more sodium than needed anyway, a high-sodium water is not recommended.

(over)

Although state and federal organizations do not specify a limit on sodium at this time, Juday found many brands exceeded limits set on other substances. Vichy water from France, for example, showed a higher concentration of fluoride than state regulations allow for Montana.

Many brands passed the EPA standards and Prof. Juday's tests with flying colors. The Pennsylvania waters contained the least amount of dissolved solids while the one Montana brand, Big Spring water from Lewistown, also met federal requirements easily.

The French Evian, another inoffensive brand, most closely resembles well waters from the Missoula valley. Of the more than 600 local wells that have been analysed in a water study of the valley, only one exceeded limits specified by the EPA. It was high in nitrate.

Juday also said people on low-sodium diets should avoid softened water for drinking purposes since the softening process adds considerable sodium to the water.

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