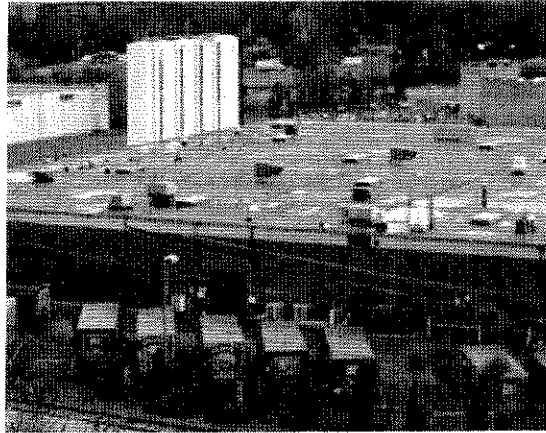


<http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/news/x947780042/Nestle-bottles-sells-filtered-Framingham-tap-water>

Nestle bottles, sells filtered Framingham tap water



Allan Jung/Daily News staff
Nestle water bottling plant on Pennsylvania Avenue in Framingham

By Dan McDonald/Daily News staff
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FRAMINGHAM —

The Framingham Technology Park off Rte. 9 does not evoke the idyllic and tranquil images often associated with ads promoting bottled drinking water.

Yet a 105 Pennsylvania Ave. plant, nestled in the shadow of Bose Mountain, is such a fountainhead for one particular product: Ice Mountain Purified Drinking Water.

Nestle Waters North America, the company that markets Ice Mountain, has drawn water from the town's municipal source, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, or MWRA, for several years from its Tech Park facility.

At the plant, the water that is sold as purified drinking water (not spring water) is treated through processes like ultraviolet activated carbon filtration, ozonation and reverse osmosis, before it is bottled into five-gallon jugs and then sold.

Nestle is an industry giant that distributes numerous water brands, including Poland Spring. That product is transported from two locations in Maine and bottled at the Pennsylvania Avenue facility.

The Framingham plant consumes about 31 million gallons of water annually, according to a January 2008 report.

"I think they're our largest customer," said Paul Barden, the town's director of water and wastewater.

If there is an agreement or a contract between Framingham and Nestle, Barden is unaware of it.

Tier 5 "super users," such as Nestle, pay \$4.63 for every 748 gallons of water.

Environmental advocates, meanwhile, continue to criticize water giants like Nestle for eroding public trust in tap water, affecting water tables and harming the environment.

Just last week, groups like Clean Water Action, Corporate Accountability International and Toxics Action Center sent representatives to Beacon Hill to push for a moratorium on drawing spring water.

Detractors say commercial bottlers have the potential to suck communities dry.

In Michigan and California, lopsided agreements between Nestle and some communities have prompted lawsuits, while other communities in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts have scrambled to bolster their own water bylaws in light of some bottled water operations, said Tina Clarke of Clean Water Action.

In McCloud, Calif., for instance, the town agreed to a 50-year-agreement that saw Nestle pay about one-sixty-fourth of a cent for a gallon of water and selling it for more than \$1.

"They want to have a contract so they have the legal rights to the water," said Clarke. "They want to be able to keep pumping even if the wells go dry or farmers can't get water for their crop. People are beginning to realize that it's a very bad idea to sign over your local water."

Despite the size of the bottling operation in Framingham, Nestle's use of 31 million gallons per year appears to be a proverbial drop in the bucket.

In 2007, the MWRA processed about 214.21 million gallons of drinking water a day. Its two major sources, the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs, have the capacity to hold about 477 billion gallons combined.

Tom Brennan, senior natural resource manager for Nestle Waters North America, testified before Beacon Hill lawmakers on Nov. 6 that the bottled water industry uses less than four one-thousandths of 1 percent of all utilized fresh water.

That hasn't stopped activists from trying to put the brakes on Nestle projects in Clinton, Sterling and Montague, said Clarke.

Sara Joseph, spokeswoman for Corporate Accountability International, thinks such companies set bad precedents.

At a time when the nation needs \$22 billion worth of repairs to its water systems, bottled water companies keep the public from thinking about water supply problems, said Joseph.

Marketing campaigns dupe the public into buying a product that is essentially the same thing they pay for as part of their public water system, she said.

"The effect of that marketing is casting a public doubt upon the public water system," said Joseph. "Even though they're the exact same thing; 40 percent of bottled water is really just tap water."

Jane Lazgin, a spokeswoman for Nestle, disagreed.

She said procedures like reverse osmosis, "changes the character of the source water."

Gigi Kellett, who is directing a campaign called Think Outside the Bottle for Corporate Accountability International, said the company has a shoddy track record "when it comes to being a good neighbor."

"When you think about local water and local control, it's important that communities are able to make decisions for the public and democratic good and Nestle has been a bad neighbor and tried to preempt that," she said.

In 2003, residents of Mecosta Couty, Mich., took Nestle to court claiming that a company plan would harm the ecosystem. Nestle wanted to pump more than 200 million gallons annually from a protected habitat source, according to Corporate Accountability International. A judge eventually ruled in favor of Nestle.

"It's the same source water as our tap water. They're bottling our water that we as taxpayers have already paid for to ensure delivery and selling it back to us," said Kellett.

In Framingham, Ethan Mascoop, the town's director of public health, is reviewing an annual state-mandated permit application for the Nestle's Pennsylvania Avenue site.

In the application, the International Bottled Water Association notes that the company is not in compliance with one of its standards because the plant is not "under the supervision of a competent manager."

Lazgin, Nestle's spokeswoman, indicated the plant supervisor's industry certification has lapsed, but that "it will be all buttoned up by the time the next inspection comes (in early 2009.)"

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