

Bottled water labels need more information: GAO

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WASHINGTON — Two new reports released July 8 at a congressional oversight subcommittee hearing recommend that bottled water be labeled with the same level of information municipal water providers must disclose, according to July 8 Associated Press (AP) [report](#).

The reports, one by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, and the other by the advocacy group Environmental Working Group, say that consumers know less about the water they buy in bottles than what comes from their taps because the two are regulated differently. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates bottled water as a food item; the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates publicly supplied water.

The GAO study, [called for by federal lawmakers](#) in February 2008, was prompted by an increase in per capita consumption of bottled water in the United States. "With this increase have come several concerns in recent years about the safety, quality and environmental impacts of bottled water," according to [highlights of the report](#).

The GAO report concluded that "many consumers often believe that bottled water is safer or healthier than tap water."

The GAO report also noted the FDA has yet to set standards for the chemical DEHP, one of several substances known as phthalates that are found in many household products, while the EPA limits the presence of phthalates in tap water to 6 parts per billion (ppb). The full name of DEHP is bis(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate.

The GAO report recommends that the FDA:

- Issue a standard of quality for DEHP, or publish its reasons for not doing so
- Implement its findings regarding the methods that are feasible for conveying information to consumers regarding the quality and safety of bottled water.

According to the GAO, the FDA "generally agreed with GAO's recommendations."

The Environmental Working Group disclosed results of its 18-month long [study](#) during the hearing. According to a July 8 EWG [release](#), the EWG investigation of almost 200 popular bottled water brands found less than 2 percent disclose the water's source, how the water has been purified and what chemical pollutants each bottle of water may contain. "Just 2 of the 188 individual brands EWG analyzed disclosed those three basic facts about their water," the release said.

The International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) also presented testimony to federal lawmakers during the hearing on the regulation of bottled water. According to a July 8 IBWA [press release](#), IBWA President and CEO Joe Doss stated: "Bottled water is comprehensively and stringently regulated in the United States at both the federal and state levels, which helps ensure its safety and quality. ... As with other packaged foods and beverages, bottled water must meet FDA's general food regulations, which include extensive labeling requirements for ingredients; the name and place of business of the manufacturer, packer or distributor; the product's net weight; and, if required, nutrition labeling."

Doss noted that bottled water also must adhere to FDA standards regarding the type of water that the bottle contains, standards of quality, and good manufacturing practices.

"IBWA supports a consumer's right to clear, accurate and comprehensive information about the bottled water products they purchase," Doss said.