

Buying bottled water is wrong, says Suzuki

Environmentalist launches national tour on green issues

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David Suzuki says plastic water bottles generate waste and potential health hazards because of their chemical composition.

Canadians wanting to do something about the environment can start by drinking tap water, environmentalist David Suzuki says.

"Everywhere I go across Canada, I insist I be given tap water when I get up to speak," Suzuki told CBC News on Thursday.

"I think in Canada it's absolutely disgusting that people are so uncertain about their water that we buy it, paying more for bottled water than we do for gasoline."

Suzuki — who was in St. John's on Thursday to launch a cross-country speaking tour aimed at engaging people in politics, particularly environmental issues — said there is no good reason for Canadians to buy bottled water.

Moreover, he said it's destructive to import bottled water from producers in countries such as France.

"It's nuts to be shipping water all the way across the planet, and us — because we're so bloody wealthy — we're willing to pay for that water because it comes from France," he said in an interview.

"I don't believe for a minute that French water is better than Canadian water. I think that we've got to drink the water that comes out of our taps, and if we don't trust it, we ought to be raising hell about that."

Key environmental issues with bottled water, Suzuki said, are waste and uncertainty over the long-term health effects created by plastic.

"Not only does bottled water lead to unbelievable pollution — with old bottles lying all over the place — but plastic has chemicals in it," he said.

"Plastics are ubiquitous. I don't believe that plastics are not involved in a great deal of the health problems that we face today."

Last August, delegates to the United Church of Canada's general council voted to discourage the purchase of bottled water within its churches. The motion called on church members to advocate against the "privatization of water" and to support healthy local supplies of water.

50 stops on Suzuki's tour

Suzuki spoke Thursday to a group of students. Through his David Suzuki Foundation, Suzuki will be visiting 50 communities across the country throughout February.

The tour is called "If You Were Prime Minister," and asks participants to identify what environmental regulations they want politicians to enact.

"This was actually planned months and months ago, and it just happens to coincide with this tremendous upsurge in public concern in the environment," said Suzuki.

The purpose of the tour, he said, is to tap into basic concerns that Canadians have about the environment, and then bring those messages to Ottawa.

"Right now, we're at the top of the polls and the politicians are going to do everything they can to seem green. But it's up to us to demand that those things be done — not just rhetoric."

Suzuki, meanwhile, said the tour does not indicate he has political aspirations. At 70, he said, he sees himself as "an old fart" and that running for office is best left for a younger generation.