

## 'Indian villages facing water shortage due to extraction'

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WASHINGTON — Water extraction by multinational Coca-Cola for its products in India has caused shortage of the natural resource in over 50 villages, a US environmental group has said while noting that bottled water consumption in the country has tripled in the past five years.

A study published by the Washington-based Earth Policy Institute said global consumption of bottled water reached 154 billion litres in 2004, up 57 per cent from the 98 billion litres consumed five years earlier. Even in areas where tap water is safe to drink, demand for bottled water is increasing, producing unnecessary garbage and consuming vast quantities of energy, it said.

Although in the industrial world bottled water is often no healthier than tap water, it can cost up to 10,000 times more. Some of the largest increases in bottled water consumption have occurred in developing countries, the study notes. While per capita rates in India and China are not as high, total consumption in these populous countries has risen swiftly — tripling in India and more than doubling in China in that five-year period.

The rapid growth in this industry means that water extraction is concentrated in communities where bottling plants are located, the study said adding in India, water extraction by Coca-Cola for its brand Dasani bottled water and other drinks has caused shortages in over 50 villages.

The report did not specify the districts facing the water shortage but some villages in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan have been campaigning against drawing of water by multinational soft drink firms.

The study said similar problems have been reported in Texas and in the Great Lakes region of North America, where farmers, fishers, and others who depend on water for their livelihoods are suffering from concentrated water extraction as water tables drop quickly. The study also elaborates the harm caused to the eco-system by bottled water.

The most commonly used plastic for making water bottles is polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which is derived from crude oil.

Making bottles to meet Americans' demand for bottled water requires more than 1.5 million barrels of oil annually, enough to fuel some 100,000 US cars for a year. The United States is the world's leading consumer of bottled water, with Americans drinking 26 billion liters in 2004.

Worldwide, some 2.7 million tonnes of plastic are used to bottle water each year. After the water has been consumed, the plastic bottle must be disposed of. Incinerating used bottles produces toxic byproducts such as chlorine gas and ash containing heavy metals. Buried water bottles can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade.

Almost 40 per cent of the PET bottles that were deposited for recycling in the United States in 2004 were actually exported, sometimes to as far away as China adding to the resources used by this product.

Studies show that consumers associate bottled water with healthy living. But bottled water is not guaranteed to be any healthier than tap water, according to the study.

It said roughly 40 per cent of bottled water begins as tap water; often the only difference is added minerals that have no marked health benefit.

From the Khaleej Times Online