

Case Study: Washington University in St. Louis

Bottled Water Alternatives, University Edition
October 29, 2009

Deborah Howard, Assistant to the Executive Vice
Chancellor of Administration and Liz Kramer, Fellow

Deborah_Howard@WUSTL.EDU

Kramer@wustl.edu

Overview of the WUSTL Bottled Water Ban

- ▶ Idea for bottled water ban first floated for Commencement 2008.
- ▶ Student leadership picked up the idea and began a campaign in the fall of 2008.
- ▶ Administration worked internally to build consensus and support starting in the summer 2008 and throughout the fall.
- ▶ Implemented for vending and most dining in January 2009, taking full effect in March.
- ▶ On-going education, infrastructure improvements and compromise for a successful bottled water ban.

Why Ban Bottled Water?

- ▶ Bottled water is wasteful in transportation, processing and production.
- ▶ Downcycling of plastic bottles rather than recycling or reuse.
- ▶ Supporting our St. Louis municipal system.
- ▶ Asking members of our community to make a lifestyle change for the sake of the University's sustainability.

Challenges

- ▶ Convenience of bottled water.
- ▶ Safety of bottled water and of tap water sources..
- ▶ Concerns about access to tap water on campus.
- ▶ Mixed messages due to other bottled drinks.
- ▶ Safety at large events, especially outdoors.
- ▶ Little education or awareness about water issues.

Convenience of Bottled Water

- ▶ Students, staff and faculty had concerns about the convenience of bottled water for everyday use.
- ▶ Students designed and sold 'Tap It' water bottles.
- ▶ All freshman receive new water bottles upon arrival.
- ▶ Water bottles available for sale in the bookstore.
- ▶ Infrastructure improvement to drinking fountains throughout campus for greater access.
- ▶ 5-gallon water coolers are still permitted and are located in many offices and student rooms.

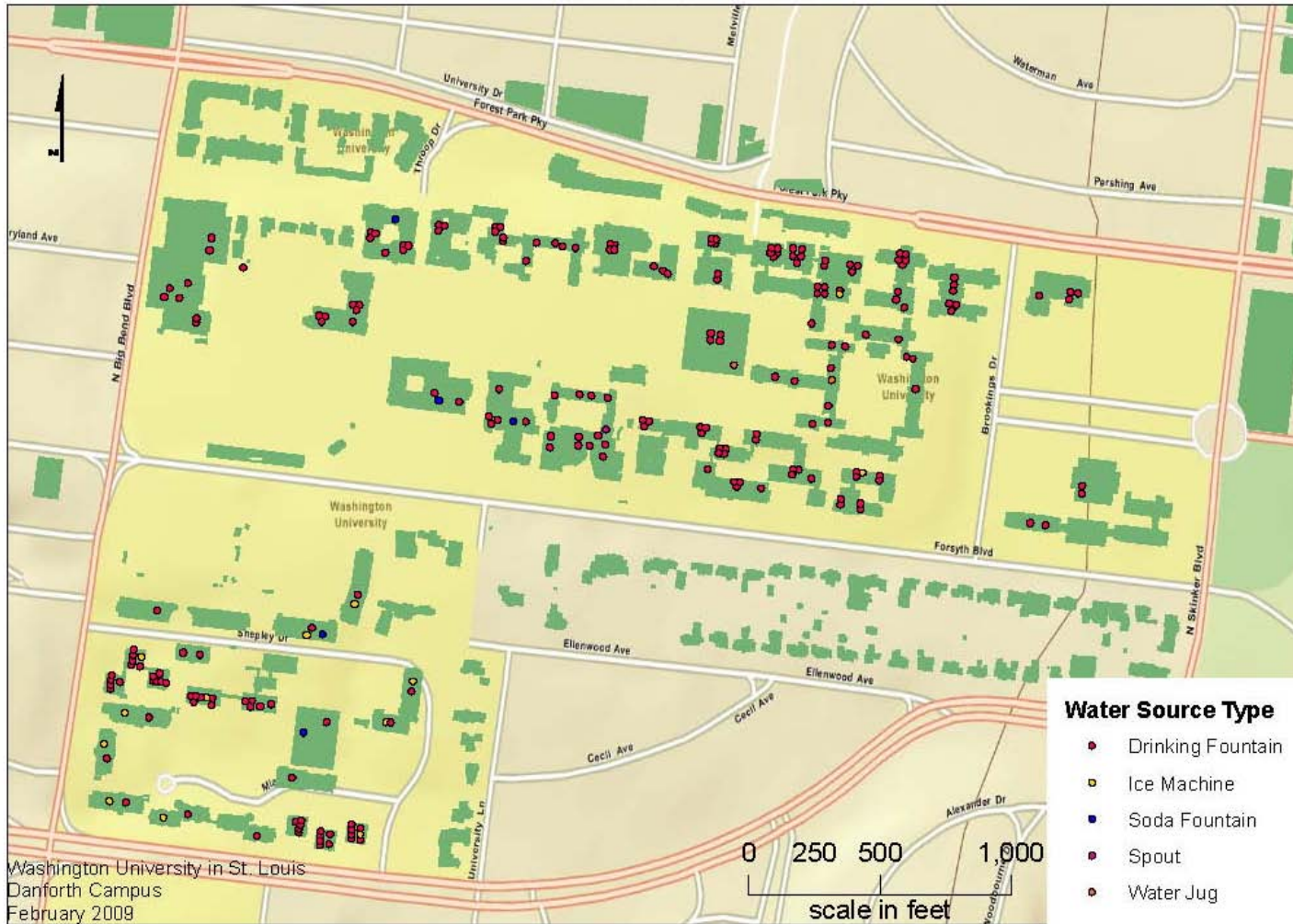
Safety of Bottled Water and Tap Sources

- ▶ Some misconceptions about the safety of bottled water as compared to tap water.
- ▶ Student campaign addressed as part of their literature.
- ▶ Checked into the safety of St. Louis City and County water as determined by the EPA.
- ▶ Followed-up on specific questions about safety of public drinking fountains and public water sources.
- ▶ Confirmed that housekeeping does clean the drinking fountains regularly.

Concerns About Access to Tap Water on Campus

- ▶ Tap water had been available in drinking fountains, soda fountains, some free-standing carafes, and in water coolers previously.
- ▶ All water sources were mapped and tested for functionality. Over 75 were reported for problems to facilities. A new drinking fountain was installed in the popular 24-hour café in the library. New point-of-use dispensers were added at the conference center.
- ▶ A current project in the student senate is looking at further possibilities for infrastructure improvements, including potentially labeling and new access points.

Drinking Fountain Map





Mixed Messages About Other Bottled Drinks

- ▶ Many community members were disappointed and confused why we did not also address sodas, juices and milks, also in plastic bottles.
- ▶ Focused on the idea that these things do not come from the tap and are therefore not directly replaceable.
- ▶ Some ongoing concern about increased consumption of other beverages instead of bottled water due to direct replacement in vending – no measured data available, but could be part of a future education campaign.

Safety at Large Events, Especially Outdoors

- ▶ Worked directly with Commencement to find a compromise for water bottles – many fewer bottles were purchased, and put on tables with signs specifying that these bottles were for guests only.
- ▶ WILD (biannual outdoor concert for students) offered other options and is working with the student-run Green Events Commission (GEC) in the future.
- ▶ Administration and GEC work with groups on a case-by-case basis to determine appropriate water.
- ▶ Students have suggested installing an outdoor drinking fountain; currently being investigated.



Case Study: Washington University in St. Louis Student “Tap it” Campaign

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Kady McFadden, Student
kadymcfadden@gmail.com



“Tap It” Campaign

- ▶ Student run campaign
- ▶ Goal was to gain student support for ban
- ▶ Did this by hosting events and raising awareness of the issue on campus



Events Hosted

- ▶ Built a 'Tower of Consumption' out of used bottles





Events Hosted

- ▶ Distributed flyers on campus



U.S. water quality standards set by the EPA for tap water are more stringent than the FDA's standards for bottled water.¹

A NRDC study found 1/3 of bottled water to be contaminated above the allowable limits.²



Events Hosted

► Put table tents in dining areas

Energy Consumption: It is estimated that filling each bottled water bottle one-quarter full of oil represents the oil expended in producing, packaging and transporting bottled water.¹

STL Tap Water: St. Louis was awarded “Best Tasting City Water in America” in 2007 by the U.S. Conference of Mayors.²

False Security?: U.S. water quality standards set by the EPA for tap water are more stringent than the FDA’s standards for bottled water.³ Also a NRDC study found 1/3 of bottled water to be contaminated above the allowable limits.⁴

Wasted Plastic: More than 60 million plastic bottles end up in landfills everyday. The bottles cannot be recycled, only decycled into low grade plastics.⁵

It’s the Same: Over 25% of bottled water is just tap water - it comes from municipal sources ⁶ (including Dasani)

Really the question is...why



Events Hosted

- ▶ Held Tap Water Challenges





Events Hosted

- ▶ Sold “Tap-It” water bottles (BPA free)





What Went Well

- ▶ Generating student awareness on the issue; students talked about it and realized the inefficiencies
- ▶ Widespread student support of the initiative

Contact Information

Liz Kramer

Washington University in St. Louis

Tel: (314) 935-3454

Email: kramer@wustl.edu

Website: wustl.edu

Kady McFadden

kadymcfadden@gmail.com

Thank You!