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Emerson College phasing out bottled water on campus

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 21, 2012

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Emerson College has begun phasing out the sale of plain bottled water on its Boston campus, joining a growing number of colleges across the country making the eco-friendly push.

Like other schools, Emerson says it hopes to reduce plastic waste from water bottles. Bottled water is significantly more expensive but less environmentally friendly than tap water, college officials said. Despite marketing suggesting otherwise, studies have found bottled water is not any safer than tap water.

The Emerson president, Lee Pelton, announced the change last week in an e-mail, saying that buying bottled water with institutional funds will be “strongly discouraged.”

The school plans to install new “hydration stations” and retrofit some water fountains to make them more reusable-bottle friendly. The use of water jugs will be phased out, and the school will continue to install filtration systems.

Administrators also pledged to ensure that campus events catered by its food vendor will serve pitchers of water, instead of bottles.

Emerson stressed that its action does not preclude students from buying bottled water independently and drinking it on the downtown campus.

While some students applauded the college’s decision, others were skeptical.

Aja Neahring, 20, a junior, said she already avoids buying bottled water and carries a refillable water container instead.

“I think it’s a great idea as long as they follow through with those hydration stations,” she said.

Others, like Danny Chamberlain, 18, said he did not believe the school’s push to phase out bottled water was necessary.

While the freshman sat at a table inside Emerson’s dining area, next to his laptop, he had an opened Poland Spring water in one of the Nestle-brand’s 16.9-ounce “Eco-Shape” bottles that uses 30 percent less plastic than its previous design.

“Poland Spring is pretty green already,” Chamberlain said. “[Emerson is] being overly cautious about being green, I think. I feel like they have a lot of other bottled drinks on campus, so why not keep water, which is more healthy,” than sugary alternatives like soda or sports drinks.

He said he prefers the taste of bottled water over tap water.

“You can tell it’s clean,” he said. “When you get water from a fountain, it doesn’t always have the same taste.”

Dartmouth College, Harvard University, and Brown University are among the New England campuses that have restricted the use of plastic water bottles.

In fall 2010, Brown removed bottled water from its dining and retail outlets. The school has reduced its bottled water use by about 83 percent since 2008, Chris Powell, the college’s director of sustainable energy



and environmental initiatives, said Tuesday.

Instead of ordering 320,000 water bottles annually, he said, the school now orders about 50,000 each year, half of which are used to restock an emergency reserve.

The rest are used at large gatherings, like commencement, where bottled water remains a more practical option for keeping eventgoers hydrated.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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