

Hydration stations sweep colleges to promote tap water

By Wendy Koch and Kirsti Marohn, USA TODAY

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Filling stations are no longer just for gas. In an eco-friendly push, hundreds of U.S. colleges are installing water fountains known as hydration stations so students can refill water bottles rather than buy new ones. Some campuses are even banning the sale of bottled water.



By Dave Schwarz, The St. Cloud (Minn.) Times

Emily Martin fills her water bottle at one of several new hydration stations at the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., on Sept. 2.

The stations are also popping up in airports, parks, office buildings — and even on tours with bands, including the [Black Eyed Peas](#)— as efforts proliferate to reduce plastic waste by promoting tap water.

Adding to this push is a network of more than 800 restaurants and cafes nationwide that have agreed to give people with reusable bottles free water refills. New York-based TapIt, a non-profit group launched in 2009, has worked with city governments to sign up eateries in 22 states. Next month, Philadelphia is slated to join, says TapIt's William Schwartz.

VIDEO: [College bans bottled water](#)

STORY: [Colleges moving away from plastic water bottles](#)

"It's the right product at the right time," says Rod Magnuson, of Elkay, which began selling several versions of the water stations last year.

Elkay reports more than 150 colleges and universities have installed its refilling stations. About the same number have installed Brita ones, which launched in November, says spokeswoman Katy Loos.

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"They're so much easier than tipping bottles under the old water fountains," says [Mike Gallagher](#), a sophomore at Immaculata (Pa.) College, which has 20 stations. "You can fill them all the way to the top."

What will this mean for bottled water? After a two-year dip, consumption rose 3.5% last year when it averaged 28.3 gallons per American, according to the [International Bottled Water Association](#), an industry group.

"It has a following that's strong," especially as recycling of plastic bottles gets easier, says the group's Tom Lauria. He doesn't expect hydration stations to hurt sales, adding: "There's probably enough room for both."

Contributing: Marohn also reports for the St. Cloud (Minn.) Times