

Bottled water on report...

As reported by the West
Australian Friday 5 May 2000

SYDNEY

More than a third of bottled water sold in Australia is reportedly contaminated with an agent that could cause health problems.

Some brands of bottled water may contain up to 20 times the recommended level of bromate, a substance that can cause temporary nausea, diarrhoea, central nervous system depression and permanent kidney failure and deafness, a study has shown.

The study, posted on the Australian Consumer Association's Choice Web site yesterday, tested small samples of 30 brands of bottled water and found 12 of them contained a higher level of bromate than is recommended for tap water.

Bromate, which is also a suspected carcinogen, is formed when water which already contains bromide is purified by a process called ozonation.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that tap water should contain no more than 0.02 mg of bromate per litre. Bottled water is considered a food and is not covered by these guidelines.

The study, done by the Australian Water Quality Centre and the University of South Australia, analysed one bottle of each of 30 brands. Nineteen had been treated with ozone, and of these 12 contained high levels of bromate.

One contained no less than 0.383 mg/l, almost 20 times the limit recommended for tap water.

The study found a brand which had been treated by ozonation and then passed through a filter had an acceptable level of bromate.

The authors have not released the brand names.

One of the study's authors, Dennis Mulcahy, an associate professor in the school of chemical technology at the University of South Australia, said there was no evidence that anyone had become sick from drinking bottled water.

International Bottled Water Association chief executive Mr Tony Gentile criticised the study's sample size.

"We find it absolutely disgusting that these people who released the study... Which is causing public concern, are not willing to provide us with the information so we can follow up the companies where they have a problem," he said.