

## Eau dear: Party turns flat for French bottled water

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By [Catherine Field](#)

PARIS – The land that gave the world Perrier, Evian and Vittel is turning its back on bottled water, preferring instead to get the stuff from the tap.

Cost-cutting at a time of austerity but also the successful efforts of campaign groups about the snobbery and environmental cost of bottled water are hitting sales.

Sales of bottled water in France fell in volume by 7.5 per cent to 5.2 billion litres in 2008 over 2007, and retreated in value by 4.6 per cent to 1.6 billion (\$3 billion), according to market monitor ACNielsen.

Worst hit were products with added fruit flavours, whose sales were down 22 per cent, while uncarbonated spring and mineral waters fell by 6.6 and 9.6 per cent respectively. Sales of sparkling water fell by 1.8 per cent.

"Sales of bottled water have probably been affected by the economic crisis," said Jacques Dupre of Iri France, a marketing consultancy.

"Consumers have rationalised purchases of certain products and bottled water is a part of this trend, because it can be replaced by tap water." He added: "There's also been an ecological effect, as part of the awareness of sustainable development. If you are a consumer and want to save money, you might as well do it from a viewpoint by which you are also helping the environment."

In restaurants, the number of diners who order a carafe of tap water, rather than bottled water, rose by 15 per cent last year, according to a survey by monitor NPD.

Until the crunch, the French ranked behind Italy as the biggest consumers of bottled water in the world, guzzling 130 litres of it per person per year. National consumption has doubled in 20 years.

Environmentalists have long made bottled water a favourite target, attacking the carbon footprint – emissions in greenhouse gases – that comes from bottling and transporting the product, and handling a quarter million tonnes of packaging each year.

Their campaign found an unusual ally in SEDIF, an organisation representing water companies in the Paris region. In 2004, SEDIF launched a poster campaign that said there was no difference in hygiene levels between local tap water and bottled water but a difference of up to 100 times in price.

Many French people who are still reluctant to drink directly from the tap are buying filters that removing any impurities.

Europe's biggest filter manufacturer, Brita of Germany, which says it has 76 per cent of the French market, reported an increase in French sales of 25 per cent last year.