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FAIZAL

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Bottled Newater,
new thinking needed

Reconsider if there are
alternatives to avoid
bottles being discarded

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THE ubiquitous bottle of mineral water that many of us can't seem to do without — especially in this heat — has come under the spotlight following a rural Australian town's decision last month to ban bottled water in its district.

And at home, Professor Tommy Koh, chairman of the Governing Council of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, also touched on the hazards of importing and drinking bottled water in an article he co-authored for the PUB magazine, *Pure*.

In the article, Prof Koh urged the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources to write to all ministries, statutory boards, agencies, Temasek-linked companies and educational institutions to consider stopping the practice of serving bottled water.

Given the growing concern about the environmental impact of bottled water — among other things, discarded plastic bottles end up as litter or go into landfill — will businesses and organisations in Singapore review their use of bottled water?

The Public Utilities Board (PUB) said it is re-examining the ways it distributes Newater in order to reduce its use of plastic bottles.

Instead of giving out bottled Newater at events, one alternative being looked at is to use a water dispenser, a PUB spokeswoman told TODAY in response to queries on its use of plastic bottles for Newater.

According to the PUB, it manufactures 50 million gallons of Newater every day — the equivalent of 90 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Some 2,000 litres of it — which can fill up over 5,700 bottles — are bottled for distribution to the public as part of the national water

agency's public education campaigns.

This amount is less than 0.001 per cent of the amount of Newater being produced each day, said a spokeswoman.

Most of the Newater that PUB produces is supplied to factories, commercial and office buildings for air-con cooling through a dedicated distribution pipeline system.

When asked by TODAY if PUB should manufacture fewer bottles of Newater, Prof Koh pointed out that PUB is not in the business of selling bottled Newater and the latter is used for promoting public acceptance.

Dr Seetharam Kallidaikurichi, director of the Institute of Water Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said the amount of bottled Newater is an insignificant quantity to cause any environmental concerns.

However, he added, the public should be made aware of the "unnecessary" buying of bottled water for drinking, especially in places where tap water is safe to drink, such as in houses and restaurants. This is because such a practice can turn into a habit and this will lead to even more plastic bottles being used — and discarded.

Some hotels — the sector is one where the use of bottled water is high — told TODAY that they are also looking at ways to reduce the use of such plastic bottles.

The Royal Plaza on Scotts hotel has stopped serving bottled water at meetings since the start of the year.

It places about 500 to 600 bottled water daily in its guestrooms and there are no plans to reduce this number now because the complimentary beverage bar in guestrooms is a unique selling point for the hotel, said a spokeswoman.

On why hotels serve bottled water in guestrooms, a spokeswoman from Meritus Mandarin Hotel said: "Generally, travellers (particularly from European countries) expect bottled water to be made available in the guestrooms. Also, bottled water is widely served in hotels Asia-wide."