

Thirsty work

Drinking water in parks



We're all encouraged to get more exercise and, particularly for children, parks can be a great place to get active, whether it's playing in the playground or kicking a football about. But activity can be thirsty work, and in many parks today there's nowhere to get fresh, clean drinking water.

Children often have to go thirsty or visit the nearest ice cream van, shop or takeaway where there may be few healthy options available, and lots of tempting but unhealthy drinks and snacks on offer.

Children's health

Soft drinks are often high calorie, and regular consumption of soft drinks is linked to childhood obesity and tooth decay. It can also lead to children developing a taste for sweet products. With evidence that children sometimes mistake thirst for hunger¹, lack of drinking water in parks can lead to children consuming calories they don't need, and otherwise wouldn't.

Despite lip service to the contrary, soft drinks manufacturers still market their products to children. Some have reacted to health concerns by developing flavoured waters as an alternative, but it's far from clear that these are a better choice. Some of these products contain controversial additives such as Acesulfame K and sodium benzoate (E211), and many still contain sugar, often at similar levels to the fizzy drinks they seek to replace.

Drinking for the planet

We're increasingly being reminded of the importance of drinking plenty of water, and while water is a much healthier option than soft drinks, bottled water is expensive and damages the environment. While a number of government departments and local authorities

have switched from bottled water to tap, provision of mains-fed drinking water in public places such as parks remains woefully inadequate.

Drinking water in parks

Historically, many of today's public parks were set up in the nineteenth century to provide local people with a healthy and green respite from inner city life. Often provision of clean drinking water was seen as a key aspect of this service. Today, people have access to safe drinking water in their homes, so fountains in many parks have been removed or not maintained properly.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the current provision of drinking water in parks is, at best, inadequate and often completely lacking. Often large parks have too few sources of drinking water, requiring people to walk long distances for water.

However, there are signs that some key decision makers are realising the benefits of providing drinking water in parks. Last year London Mayor Boris Johnson was reported to be considering providing more drinking fountains in parks and other public spaces across London.

¹ Hilpern, K. (2003) It's the real thing. London: The Independent, 23 June 2003

Our campaign

We would like to see drinking water in all public parks across the UK. To achieve this, we need your help.

- 1) Visit your local park and do our drinking water survey**, using the downloadable survey sheet on our website at www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodcampaign/waterinparks. If your park has a fountain, take a photo of it and post it on the Children's Food Network or email it to Jackie@sustainweb.org.
- 2) Let us know what you found by entering your results online.** Follow the link from www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodcampaign/waterinparks. If you prefer, you can post your completed survey to Drinking Water in Parks, Children's Food Campaign, 94 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PF. Please return your surveys by 30th September 2009.
- 3) If you're unhappy with the drinking water provided at your local park, contact your local council's parks department to ask them to improve it.** You can download a template letter and find contact details for your local council at www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodcampaign/waterinparks. If you get a response, please send a copy to us at Drinking Water in Parks, Children's Food Campaign, 94 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PF.

We will use this information to develop a picture of drinking water provided in parks across the country. We hope to be able to highlight where councils are doing a good job, and explore the reasons why there is not better provision in some areas. This will help us to mount a national campaign to make sure drinking water is available in every public park across the country.



www.childrensfoodcampaign.org.uk

Children's Food Campaign

For more information about the Children's Food Campaign, to join our network or sign up to monthly email updates, visit our website: www.childrensfoodcampaign.org.uk.

The Children's Food Campaign wants to improve children's health and well-being through better food - and food teaching - in schools, and protecting children from junk food marketing. We are supported by over 300 organisations, almost 300 MPs and 12,000 members of the public. The Children's Food Campaign is coordinated by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming and funded by the British Heart Foundation.