

Let's better protect our natural mineral waters!^[1]
Press release from the French Academy of Medicine
June 6, 2024

According to the French Public Health Code, natural mineral water (NMW) is a water “microbiologically healthy, meeting microbiological and physicochemical quality criteria, and coming from an aquifer or an underground deposit. Its essential characteristics, in terms of composition and temperature at emergence, are stable” (1). This stability is made possible by the underground origin of the NMW which is protected from any risk of pollution (physical, chemical, microbial, etc.). Produced in the depths of earth by long, complex and fragile hydrogeological processes, NMW “is distinguished from other waters intended for human consumption by its content of minerals, trace elements or other constituents, and its purity” (1). Its beneficial nature for health is recognized in the context of its use in thermal cures or as drinking water. NMWs are a precious asset for our country. Each year, five billion liters are used to treat chronic ailments of half a million spa guests and more than seven billion liters of bottled NMW are consumed. France is the world's leading exporter of NMWs.

NMW resources are, however, fragile, as exposed to strong pressures: reduction in precipitation linked to climate change; excessive withdrawals for sales in bottles; urbanization and artificialization of spaces due to demographic and economic development; release into the environment of pollutants from human, industrial and agricultural activities. These elements risk of combining their deleterious effects on the quality, protection and renewal of these groundwaters. Thus, in 2022, 6.8% of samples, at the packaging point of bottled NMWs, did not comply with the quality limits provided for by the regulations (2).

Underlining the great value of the original quality of NMWs but their fragility, and the essential link between therapeutics and the original qualities of NMWs, the French Academy of Medicine:

- recalls the importance of protecting the health benefits of the different uses of NMWs;
- warns of the need to prevent a growing share of groundwater resources from losing NMW status, due to the non-compliance of their quality with current regulations;
- recommends implementing an assessment of the present state and the foreseeable quantitative and qualitative developments of existing NMW resources;
- calls for strengthening measures to prevent contamination of NMW resources.

References

- Articles R-1322-2 and R-1322-3 of the French Public Health Code.
- Ministry of Health and Prevention, Report on the quality of packaged water in France, 2023.
https://sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2022_qualite_eaux_conditionnees.pdf;

Declaration of links of interest

Each year, the French Academy of Medicine awards the SOCIÉTÉ DES EAUX MINÉRALES D'ÉVIAN-LES-BAINS PRIZE of €2,500 which is intended to encourage scientific research.

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^[1] Press release from the Academy's Rapid Communication Platform.