

# Brattleboro Reformer

## World Water Day draws attention to poor water quality

By DOMENIC POLI / Reformer Staff  
Wednesday March 21, 2012

BRATTLEBORO -- Many take for granted that case of bottled water in the refrigerator or the ability to wash their hands without fear of contamination.

But one in five human beings has no access to drinking water -- resulting in the deaths of 5,000 children daily -- and one third of the world's population lack adequate sanitation.

These are just two of the facts Pure Water for the World wants to continue to relay to people through messages and social media on Thursday, designated as World Water Day. PWW's executive director, Carolyn Crowley Meub, said the organization will use Facebook, Twitter and its own online newsletter to get the word out on the devastating effects a lack of clean water and hygiene can have.

The United Nations General Assembly first designated March 22 as World Day for Water in 1993.

Meub said PWW is aiming to urge citizens not to waste precious H<sub>2</sub>O and realize that a small group of individuals can have a big impact on a community thousands of miles away.

PWW's mission started in 1994, after a Brattleboro dentist named Peter Abell volunteered to provide medical services in a small village in El Salvador. He was astonished by the poor living conditions and with the help of the Brattleboro Rotary Club, of which he was a member, he dedicated himself to making a positive difference.

After reading an article in *The Rotarian* -- Rotary International's monthly magazine -- Abell and three other local members decided to provide the village with solar water purification units.

"That's how we got started," said Abell, who is now retired from dentistry and an honorary member of the club.

When the task outgrew the club's capabilities, Pure Water for the World, Inc. was established as a 501c3 organization in 1999. PWW soon got a board of directors, which includes Abell and Brattleboro resident Phil Steckler, and a staff was hired. Other board members are from places like the Pacific Northwest and Texas. Now based in Rutland, PWW works to educate people about the importance of hygiene and sanitation and select and analyze technology for clean water solutions.

Steckler said a World Water Day is vital to promoting awareness of this international problem.

"Clean water is such an important ingredient in the well-being of everybody, especially those living in Third World countries," he said. He added that lack of hygienic water has an effect on the economic stability of communities, as a parent cannot work and make a living if he or she has to stay home with a child that has become sick due to waterborne illness.

The organization is now focusing its efforts on Honduras and Haiti.

According to [purewaterfortheworld.org](http://purewaterfortheworld.org), 80 percent of illnesses in Honduras originate from water and 50,000 of the Central American country's children under the age of 5 die each year from drinking impure H<sub>2</sub>O. The website also reports that 42 percent of Haitians do not have access to clean water and just 19 percent have access to good sanitation. Waterborne disease is the second most common cause of death in children under the age of 5 in Haiti and more than half of hospital patients are suffering from waterborne bacteria or parasites.

The website says that every day for the 14 months after a deadly earthquake struck the nation's capital of Port-au-Prince and destroyed the city's water distribution system in 2010, PWW delivered tanker-truckloads of purified water to 80,000 people thanks to funding from a charity called Save the Children.

The organization launched two water purification units, donated by Dow Chemical Company, a year ago to provide safe water to two hospitals and the thousands of people that lived close by. PWW's website said each unit provides an average of 15,000-20,000 gallons of water per day on the Caribbean island nation.

Abell said the technology behind purifying water has changed over the years, as slow sand filtration is now used. That's the method used in Rutland, according to Abell.

Meub said the devastation left by August's Tropical Storm Irene has made residents of the Green Mountain State particularly sensitive to the plight experienced by the disadvantaged.

"In the light of Irene, many Vermonters know what it is like to have to go without water, or the threat of having to go without water," she said.

She said clean, sanitary H<sub>2</sub>O is a priority among this country's elected officials, though it is not in nations like Haiti and Honduras.

All donations made to Pure Water for the World are tax-deductible, as it is a 501c3 organization.

*Domenic Poli can be reached at [dpoli@reformer.com](mailto:dpoli@reformer.com), or 802-254-2311, ext. 277.*