
The Malaysian standard of mineral water

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Malaysia has a good potential to launch its own brand of mineral water as it is readily available virtually in every state. The main problem is to locate the right amount and the right quality for commercial exploitation. Spring water that has been channelled from upstream (mountainous areas) for use in rural areas and Orang Asli settlements could be bottled and marketed as mineral water. It is unadulterated and relatively free of pollution compared to water from underground and hot springs, which if they are unpolluted could also be another excellent source of mineral water.

To date there are at least 112 brands of imported and local mineral water available for public consumption in Malaysia. These mineral waters are being sold in sparkling (carbonated) and non-sparkling (non-carbonated) forms, and contain mineral supplements considered good for the body. Analysis of 57 samples of both imported and local "made in Malaysia" mineral water, together with water from potential sources in Peninsular Malaysia, that can be commercially exploited, revealed interesting findings. The indications were that local spring water is comparable in terms of quality to imported mineral water from France (considered the undisputed leader in the mineral water business). It can also be shown that water from unpolluted and "clean" local hot springs, is arguably superior to the mineral water bottled in Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore which has found their way into the Malaysian market. However, some "made in Malaysia" mineral water are found to be not up to the mark and come from uncertain sources.

In line with the government's interest to seriously consider commercially exploiting its own mineral water and in view of its drive to woo foreign tourists, as well as based on the writer's involvement and experience in the drafting of the procedures and standards of mineral water for Malaysia, this presentation will touch upon the following themes:

- i) A critical evaluation on the perception and definition of mineral water, and its characteristics;
- ii) The reasons why mineral water attracted the attention of the Malaysian public;
- iii) The concept of mineral water standard for Malaysia;

- iv) Some comments on the published Malaysian regulation (standard?) of mineral water;
- v) Some further comments on the Malaysian standard of mineral water (i.e. comparison to CODEX, European, Australian standards, among others);
- v) Conclusion and suggestions.

Through the above presentation, it is hoped that the public at large will be more aware and conscious of the 'real' mineral water. Others who are responsible for the industry, will take the necessary steps and controls so as not only to uphold the good name of the mineral industry, but also preserve the image of Malaysia.