

Bottled-Water Group Says Stossel All Wet

The trade group for bottled-water manufacturers—yes, one actually exists—boiled over after *20/20* aired a May 6 report charging that branded versions of the world's most ubiquitous substance are a ripoff. "If you buy fancy brands because you think they taste better, you're probably just buying the hype," said correspondent **John Stossel**. He noted that some bottled waters cost \$5 a gallon, more than gasoline.

The report has prompted the **Alexandria, Va.-based International Bottled Water Association** to fire off a four-page complaint, decrying the report as "inadequately researched and lopsided."

On the show, Stossel—who has peeved other companies with past reports—pointed out that bottled water is no purer than tap water. A *20/20* blind taste test also compared top-selling brands to water from a New York City faucet. *20/20* emphasized that tap beat both **Poland Spring** and **Evian**, but downplayed the fact that bottled brands took the two top spots. New York City's finest dribbled into a third-place finish behind **Aquafina** and



A John Stossel *20/20* report is drawing criticism.



Jon Stewart inspires academic examination.



Deadwood's Ian McShane as Al Swearingen, or as we to think of him, Al Swearing Again.

FLASH!

the winner, **Kmart's** low-priced **American Fare**.

IBWA spokeswoman **Bridget Wells** says she communicated with *20/20* for two weeks as the story was produced, emphasizing that bottled offers convenience away from home and is a healthy alternative to sodas and coffee. "I'd like to give

them the benefit of the doubt that they went into this with an

open mind."

Through a spokeswoman, ABC says: "We stand by our report." That's the PR way of shrugging off the complaints like water off a duck's back.

Academia ♥s 'Daily Show'

It's hard for college students to submit papers about junk food, sex or beer, so if they're

interested in writing about topics that dovetail with their leisure pursuits, they have to cast a wider net. *The Daily Show* works nicely.

Comedy Central reports that it has been swarmed with requests from grad students doing master's theses or doctoral dissertations on the importance of **Jon Stewart** and his crew.

"I've had a dozen or two dozen requests," says network spokesman **Steve Albani**.

Generally, the inquiries are from students exploring *The Daily Show* as a political communications medium. One recent masters thesis is entitled, "The Daily Show Effect: Humor, News, Knowledge and Viewers." The author, **Georgetown University** media studies candidate **Rachel Joy Larris**, conducted an audience survey to attempt to compare the political makeup of *The Daily Show's* audience and the program's guests.

"The reason why this show

is important to study is the politicalization of what have traditionally been non-political forms, such as entertainment," Larris tells *B&C*.

Her report's conclusion, after 151 pages: *The Daily Show* booking policy is fair and balanced even if its audience tilts left. Our conclusion: Academia takes all the fun out of *The Daily Show*.

F-Man Returns

After a lull in the online tabulating of the f-words in *Deadwood* due to a camping trip (see Flash!, May 9), expletive counter **Jeff Kay** is back in the saddle again. We were fascinated to learn that in the May 8 episode, 62 f-bombs were dropped—a relatively light smattering. But what really intrigues us is who this Jeff Kay fellow is.

It turns out that the blogger behind the **West Virginia Surf Report** lives

near **Scranton, Pa.**, and is a 42-year-old warehouse manager. He's a man on a quest to disprove the widely held belief that no one could possibly count all the effing in *Deadwood*. How does he keep up with the stream of profanity on the show? Like any good manager, he created some paperwork: With his grade-school-age kids safely tucked into bed, Kay fires up the digital video recorder, takes out a form he devised and makes a check mark every time a curse word flies. Thanks to the DVR, he can rewind "if I sneeze or something and believe I may have missed one."

A grateful public has beaten a path to his Web site, thanks to a recent link on the **Drudge Report** and a mention on **Rush Limbaugh's** radio program. At first, the attention made Kay nervous. "I got a lot of e-mail from people who thought I was making some kind of statement, which couldn't be further from the truth," he says. He maintains the site as a hobby, adding with a laugh: "It kind of got out of hand." Still, resuming the f-count and getting back to work must have been a bit of a relief after his camping trip to **Myrtle Beach, S.C.** It rained the whole time—the sort of thing that can send an f-word count off the charts.

Photos: Donna Svenenelli/ABC, Stossel

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