

UN: Polluted water killing, sickening millions

The logo for Associated Press, featuring the letters 'AP' in a red, stylized font followed by the words 'Associated Press' in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

By RONALD BERA, Associated Press Writer

Mon Mar 22, 12:30 pm ET

NAIROBI, Kenya – More people die from polluted water every year than from all forms of violence, including war, the U.N. said in a report Monday that highlights the need for clean drinking water.

The report, launched Monday to coincide with World Water Day, said an estimated 2 billion tons of waste water — including fertilizer run-off, sewage and industrial waste — is being discharged daily. That waste fuels the spread of disease and damages ecosystems.

"Sick Water" — the report from the U.N. Environment Program — said that 3.7 percent of all deaths are attributed to water-related diseases, translating into millions of deaths. More than half of the world's hospital beds are filled by people suffering from water-related illnesses, it said.

"If we are not able to manage our waste, then that means more people dying from waterborne diseases," said Achim Steiner, the U.N. Undersecretary General and executive director of UNEP.

The report says that it takes 3 liters of water to produce one liter of bottled water, and that bottled water in the U.S. requires the consumption of some 17 million barrels of oil yearly.

Improved wastewater management in Europe has resulted in significant environmental improvements there, the UNEP said, but that dead zones in oceans are still spreading worldwide. Dead zones are oxygen-deprived areas caused by pollution.

"If the world is to thrive, let alone to survive on a planet of 6 billion people heading to over 9 billion by 2050, we need to get collectively smarter and more intelligent about how we manage waste, including wastewaters," Steiner said.