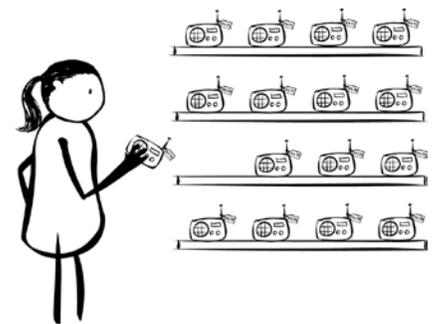

Ideas for Taking Action after Watching *The Story of Stuff*



Many people who have seen *The Story of Stuff* have asked what they can do to address the problems identified in the film. Each of us can promote sustainability and justice at multiple levels: as an individual, as a teacher or parent, a community member, a national citizen, and as a global citizen.

As Annie says in the film, “the good thing about such an all pervasive problem is that there are so many points of intervention.” That means that there are lots and lots of places to plug in, to get involved, to make a difference and we each just need to find the actions that feel right to us. To get started, think about the issues which most excite or interest you, which have a connection to your own community or family, then contact organizations at www.storyofstuff.com working on those issues to find out the best way for you to plug in.



We’ve provided some ideas below on how each of us can promote sustainability at the individual, community, city and State level. And we would like to hear your ideas. If you have suggestions for more ideas or success stories from your work, please send us a letter or email.

Things YOU can do as an individual

As *The Story of Stuff* makes clear, current consumption patterns are intertwined with a range of environmental, health, and social problems. It follows then, that changing our individual consumption choices is a good place to start. Yes, it is a good place to start, **but it is not a good place to stop.** By this, we mean that being a conscious consumer is better than being a mindless one. *Of course*, if we must buy something, we should buy the least toxic, most eco-friendly, most fairly produced products available. *Of course* we should ride public transportation and our bikes more and drive cars less. *Of course* we should recycle as much of our discards as we can. *Of course* we should do all this and more. But buying green and planting trees and changing light bulbs and recycling and all those things aren’t enough to address the scale of the problem we’re facing.

To really change things, we need to engage as political beings, to join with our neighbors as citizens in a participatory democracy, not just engage as consumers. We need political change because the real solutions we need aren't for sale in even the greenest shops.

We've listed some ideas on "greening" our individual lives below in hopes that *The Story of Stuff* viewers will adopt these practices as one step in a journey. While we are all integrating more "green" practices into our personal lives, let's also start reinvigorating our political life, our local democracy, and our communities. Because strengthening communities and engaging in local democratic action is going to bring about longer, stronger change than any change we can achieve at the supermarket check out.

- **Join or Start an organization addressing issues you're concerned about.** For this one, skip down to "Things you can do in a community or organization."
- **Power down!** A great deal of the resources we use and the waste we create is in the energy we consume. So drive less, fly less, turn off lights, buy local seasonal food (food takes energy to grow, package, store and transport), wear a sweater instead of turning up the heat, use a clothesline instead of a dryer, vacation closer to home, buy used or borrow things before buying new, recycle. All these things save energy and save you money. And, if you can switch to alternative energy by supporting a company that sells green energy to the grid or by installing solar panels on your home, bravo!
- **Support your local economy.** By shopping at locally-owned stores, keeping your money in a local credit union, buying locally grown food, donating to and working with local non-profits and co-ops, we keep money and resources closer to home, and strengthen our communities. The closer to home you keep your money, the more likely it'll come back to you in a variety of ways. Prioritize eco-friendly businesses whenever possible to build the green jobs economy in your community.
- **Waste less.** Per capita waste production in the U.S. just keeps growing. There are hundreds of opportunities each day to nurture a Zero Waste culture in your home, school, workplace, church, community. This takes developing new habits which soon become second nature. Use both sides of the paper, carry your own mugs and shopping bags, get printer cartridges refilled instead of replaced, compost food scraps, avoid bottled water and other over packaged products, upgrade computers rather than buying new ones, repair and mend rather than replace...the list is endless! The more we visibly engage in re-use over wasting, the more we cultivate a new cultural norm, or actually, reclaim an old one!
- **Talk to everyone about these issues...**At school, in line at the supermarket, on the bus...A student once asked Cesar Chavez how he organized. He said, "First, I talk to one person. Then I talk to another person." "No," said the student, "how do you organize?" Chavez answered, "First I talk to one person. Then I talk to another person." You get the point.
- **Write letters to the editor and submit articles to local press.** In the last two years, and especially with Al Gore winning the Nobel Peace Prize, the media has been forced to write about Climate Change. As individuals, we can influence the media to better represent other important

issues as well. Letters to the editor are a great way to help newspaper readers make connections they might not make without your help. Also local papers are often willing to print book and film reviews, interviews and articles by community members.

- **Consume consciously!** While doing so, remember, you are not JUST a consumer! Even though the supermarket check out is not the most strategic place to make broad systems change, it is still good to shop consciously when we do shop. If you can, buy organic, avoid toxics, buy fair trade or union made items. Avoid over packaged and single-use disposable products. And remember, conscious consuming really starts with consuming less and consuming locally—rather than buying new, borrow, buy used, or find other ways to meet your needs. Developing a community that encourages borrowing items you need saves money, avoids producing new stuff and can help build relationships with neighbors. Grow some of your own food, or shop at farmers markets and join community-supported agriculture programs. (For more helpful pointers, see the Center for a New American Dream’s Conscious Consuming program: www.newdream.org)

Things you can do as a part of a community or local organization:

While individual action is important, it’s even more important, effective and rewarding to engage in action with others who share our values. Remember, some people in the current system have a little more say than others. Let’s get together to influence or, when necessary, replace, those decision makers! For example, one elected official can ban a particular toxic chemical much faster than we can inform every shopper about its risks and alternatives. And if the elected officials are not responding to our requests to eliminate toxic threats, then let’s look at and challenge those power dynamics that are in the way!

1. Environmental Audit

If environmental issues concern you, do an environmental audit of your community or campus. Investigate the biggest sources of air pollution on www.scorecard.org and start a campaign to get those sources to implement clean production and pollution prevention measures. Call your local waste management authority and find out what is in your town’s garbage, so you can figure out which materials to target for reduction. For example, if your waste is 40% paper, you could aim to reduce it by 10% a year through a public education and outreach program on paper recycling. Begin having conversations with neighbors, other parents at the kids’ schools, classmates, to identify the top 5 or so environmental priorities for you. Then send this list to elected officials, political candidates and other decision makers to ask for action.

2. Develop a local Zero Waste infrastructure

Unfortunately, much of our municipal infrastructure (our roads, buildings, stores) are built to encourage wasting so we need to start building the systems and spaces to encourage re-use and waste prevention. We can support a local sustainable materials economy, while also getting to know our neighbors, with activities like city-wide barter and exchange days, on-line trading of used but still good items (see Freecycle.org), community gardens, car shares and carpools, composting seminars, repair centers for furniture and other goods, green jobs training corps and more. There are hundreds of examples of all these and more around the U.S. Do some internet research, or look at the organizations recommended on this webpage, and contact a group for guidance.

3. Outreach, Organize, Educate, Network

As you learn about sustainability issues, figure out ways to share this information with your neighbors, classmates, friends. There are many ways to increase the profile of sustainability issues in a community. Have a sustainability table at fairs; speak at local schools, have a poster contest for kids to design sustainability themed posters. Join a parade with floats and costumes made of all recycled materials. Organize tours to local factories and dumps so people can see where stuff comes from and where it goes. Show *The Story of Stuff* and other films at the library and churches. Invite pres and local elected officials to these activities so that it is increasingly hard for either to ignore pressing environmental and social concerns.

Things you can do at the City and State Level

It is usually easier to get sustainability policies adopted at a city or state level than a national level. And each new city or state law helps build momentum to make change at the federal level. For these ideas below, or any other city or state campaign you launch, you'll need to start familiarizing yourself with local and state decision makers and policies.

- Attend city council meetings and encourage positive local initiatives.
- Run for local office to promote sustainability and justice at all levels in every governmental discussion from school board to planning commission to Mayor's office.
- Learn about city and state tax structure and advocate for taxes for toxics and subsidies for sustainability.
- Contact groups working on Green Cities, Green Jobs, Sustainable Economies for advice and tools.

Suggestions for Specific City or State Sustainability Goals: From Green Procurement to Zero Waste:

1. Overall City Sustainability

A group called ICLEI, or Local Governments for Sustainability, works with cities around the U.S. and internationally to promote sustainability. ICLEI offers local governments an online self-assessment tool to track local sustainable development processes. You can use this tool free of charge to evaluate processes and progress towards sustainable development from a local authority perspective and to identify areas to work for improvement: www.localevaluation21.org

2. Procurement

In most cities (as well as hospitals, universities and other big institutions), there is a group of people who are responsible for purchasing decisions, or procurement, for all the supplies. Cities purchase huge quantities of everything from paper to cleaning supplies to pesticides to cars. Rather than wait for all this stuff to come through the system and be waste, many cities are now looking upstream for ways to design waste and toxics out of the system. Changing purchasing decisions is a great way to start. If you can convince your city to buy less toxic, less wasteful products then you have less waste at the back end of the flow and you can stimulate the market for greener products with large-scale purchases. For examples, see San Francisco's Department of the Environment (www.sfenvironment.org/index.html) which has recently passed legislation requiring the city to follow the Precautionary principle (www.sehn.org/precaution.html) and to purchase green products as much as possible.

3. Promoting Zero Waste

Many cities across the U.S. around the world have made commitments to Zero Waste and are slowly working their way towards that goal. Through upstream techniques like banning specific toxics and Extended Producer Responsibility and down stream programs like recycling and composting, cities and states can drastically reduce their waste. Many Zero Waste Community Plans have been adopted to guide communities in the development of new policies, programs and facilities to progress towards Zero Waste. As more cities adopt Zero Waste policies and plans, we can learn from their programs so we don't have to start from scratch with each new city. Examples of Plans that have been adopted include: the City of Oakland, CA Zero Waste Strategic Plan (<http://clerkwebsvr1.oaklandnet.com/attachments/14983.pdf>), the City of Palo Alto, CA Zero Waste Strategic Plan (www.cityofpaloalto.org/zerowaste/graphics/Strategic_Plan_Final_100405.pdf), and the City of Nelson, British Columbia Zero Waste Action Plan (www.city.nelson.bc.ca/pdf/zero_waste.pdf).

Both Oakland and Palo Alto used their website throughout the development of their plans, so you can see all the steps taken to develop those plans, and subsequent updates, at their Zero Waste websites: Oakland, CA Zero Waste website (www.zerowasteoakland.com) and Palo Alto, CA Zero Waste Website (www.cityofpaloalto.org/zerowaste/).

E-waste, or waste from discarded electronics, is an especially toxic and rapidly growing part of today's waste stream. Maine recently passed an e-waste law that establishes a system in which consumers, municipalities, and manufacturers share responsibility for ensuring that electronics are properly recycled to reclaim all useable materials and prevent the release of toxics to the environment. Such e-waste campaigns are a great way to prevent pollution and motivate electronics producers to make less-hazardous, more durable products.

The Grassroots Recycling Network (GRRN) Website for Local Government actions, provide five fact sheets that detail cutting edge solutions to urgent waste problems and offer model local government resolutions for communities wanting to take action: www.grrn.org/localgov/index.html.