
Facts from *The Story of Stuff*



- In the past three decades, **one-third** of the planet's natural resources base have been consumed.¹
- In the United States, we have **less than 4%** of our original forests left.²
- Forty percent of waterways in the US have become **undrinkable**.³
- The U.S. has 5% of the world's population but consumes 30% of the world's resources⁴ and creates 30% of the world's waste.⁵
- If everybody consumed at U.S. rates, **we would need 3 to 5 planets**.
- There are over **100,000 synthetic chemicals** in commerce today.⁶
- Only a handful of synthetic chemicals have even been tested for human health impacts and **NONE have been tested** for synergistic health impacts.⁷
- In the U.S., industry admits to releasing over **4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals** a year.⁸
- The average U.S. person now **consumes twice as much** as they did 50 years ago.⁹
- We each see more advertisements in one year than a people 50 years ago saw in a **lifetime**.¹⁰
- In the U.S. our **national happiness peaked** sometime in the 1950s.¹¹
- In the U.S., we spend **3–4 times as many hours shopping** as our counterparts in Europe do.¹²
- Average U.S. **house size has doubled** since the 1970s.¹³
- Each person in the United States makes **4 1/2 pounds of garbage** a day.¹⁴ That is twice what we each made thirty years ago.¹⁵
- For every one garbage can of waste you put out on the curb, **70 garbage cans of waste** were made upstream to make the junk in that one garbage can you put out on the curb.¹⁶



- 1 Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins, Natural Capitalism, Little Brown and Company, (1999). Excerpted from page 4: "In the past three decades, one-third of the planet's resources, its 'natural wealth,' has been consumed."
- 2 Lester Brown, Michael Renner, Christopher Flavin, Vital Signs 1998, Worldwatch Institute, Washington, D.C. "Ninety five to ninety eight percent of forests in the continental United States have been logged at least once since settlement by Europeans." Also, see: "Can't See the Forest," by Josh Sevin, in GRIST, 1 March 2000. "1 to 2 percent of original forests in the U.S. remain undisturbed."
- 3 American Rivers, Americas Most Endangered Rivers of 1998 Report, Excerpt: "Today, 40 percent of our nation's rivers are unfishable, unswimmable, or undrinkable" Available at: http://www.americanrivers.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AMR_content_e2a7
- 4 This figure is cited in many places. For example: John L Seitz: Global Issues: An Introduction, (2001).
- 5 "The U.S. produced approximately 33% of the world's waste with 4.6% of the world's population" (Miller 1998) quoted in Global Environmental Issues by Frances Harris (2004).
- 6 Many references, including: Ourstolenfuture.org; Worldwatch Institute, State of the World 2006; Nancy Evans (ed.), Breast Cancer Fund, State of the Evidence 2006 Executive Summary, available at <http://www.breastcancerfund.org/site/pp.asp?c=kwKXLdPaE&b=1370047>; Gay Daly, "Bad Chemistry" (NRDC) at <http://www.nrdc.org/onearth/06win/chem1.asp>;
- 7 "Of the more than 80,000 chemicals in commerce, only a small percentage of them have ever been screened for even one potential health effect, such as cancer, reproductive toxicity, developmental toxicity, or impacts on the immune system. Among the approximately 15,000 tested, few have been studied enough to correctly estimate potential risks from exposure. Even when testing is done, each chemical is tested individually rather than in the combinations that one is exposed to in the real world. In reality, no one is ever exposed to a single chemical, but to a chemical soup, the ingredients of which may interact to cause unpredictable health effects." From Coming Clean Campaign's Body Burden information, retrieved 11/8/07 from <http://www.chemicalbodyburden.org/>
- 8 "For Reporting Year 2005, 23,461 facilities reported to EPA's TRI Program. These facilities reported 4.34 billion pounds of on-site and off-site disposal or other releases of the almost 650 toxic chemicals." From: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Toxics Release Inventory, <http://www.epa.gov/tri/>
- 9 "Why Consumption Matters" by Betsy Taylor and Dave Tilford, in The Consumer Society Reader Edited by Juliet B Schor and Douglas Holt (2000), p. 467.
- 10 "Each of us sees more ads alone in one year than people of 50 years ago saw in an entire lifetime." Cited in DMNews magazine, 12/22/97. Another measurement of the increasing volume of ads comes from David Shenk, who estimates that the average American saw 560 daily advertising messages in 1971 and by 1997 that number had increased to over 3,000 per day, in Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut by David Shenk (1997).

- 11 Bill McKibben, Deep Economy (2007), p.35-36 and Vicky Robin, "Towards a Solution to Overconsumption" undated.
- 12 Gary Cross, Time and Money (1993), p. 192.
- 13 "Small is Beautiful: U.S. House Size, Resource Use, and the Environment" Journal of Industrial Ecology on Greener Buildings' Greenbiz. Extracted on 11/11/07 from: http://www.greenerbuildings.com/news_detail.cfm?NewsID=28392
- 14 "In 2005, U.S. residents, businesses, and institutions produced more than 245 million tons of MSW, which is approximately 4.5 pounds of waste per person per day." Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2007.
- 15 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, Municipal Waste in the United States: 2001 Facts and Figures (2003), pp.3 -4.
- 16 The Next Efficiency Revolution: Creating a Sustainable Materials Economy by John Young and Aaron Sachs, Worldwatch Institute (1994), p. 13.