

## Reducing our Stuff

I walked into a kid's toy store yesterday to find a game that I wanted. I walked through the doors and was immediately overwhelmed with the smell of plastic. Determined to find the game, I walked into the source of smell to find the hugest toy store I had ever seen. The first items were the electric games in every shape and variety. Then, an entire wall devoted to a single movie's action figures, packaged in layers and layers of plastic. I came upon the game section, disappointed not to find the game that I originally came for, but decided to look at the other games anyway. I recognized games that I used to play, like Clue, Trivia, Monopoly, and Life, but instead of just finding the games, I found several different variations of the same games. All around me were little kids running around pointing at things that they had seen advertised on television, telling their parents "I want that". I walked out past the high fructose corn syrup-filled candy, still filled with wonder about the things I had seen in the past fifteen minutes. I couldn't stop thinking about the amount of stuff I had just seen. It made me think of the Story of Stuff ([www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com)), and how much waste must come out of the toy industry. So much plastic! Then I began thinking about what we buy now that we are teens and adults. The exteriors have changed, but the mindset remains the same. We WANT that material item. Whether it is because our friend has the same red truck or because the commercial had a fun tune in an advertisement, we convince ourselves that we need the item to continue being happy. I know girls who carry around purses with the latest accessories and fads rolling around the bottom of them, the same girls who have designer jackets in every shape and color because they go out of style so quickly. I also know guys who have multiple mp3 players because the newest ones are more efficient or have more space and are somehow better than what they have. At this time, it seems impossible to reduce our waste, but there are a few things that you can do. First of all, when you find yourself at the check-out counter, before you pay for your new keychain, ask yourself if you really need it. You can avoid a lot of purchases of unnecessary things if you just stop to think about it. You'll find that you have a lot more extra money that you can use to help further green your life, or save it for something that you do need. Also, you can choose to buy used or vintage clothing. This way, no new waste is created, and the clothes etc are usually cheaper anyway. There are some stores where you can give away your clothes that don't fit anymore. Some give you money for exchange, and some stores consider your work a donation (and sometimes give tax write-offs). As you are making your purchases, think about what you are buying. What is the company? Do you know anything about the company? Where was it manufactured? Remember that our dollar bills are our power. By purchasing an item from X company, it is supporting X company and not Y or Z. If you take time to educate yourself about your items before you buy them, you may find that Y, the free-trade, local company may have better prices than X, the company whose products were manufactured with child labor. If we use our purchasing power to support companies like Y, we are allowing them to stay in business and continue producing their items responsibly. We are a materialistic society powered by money, and it is unsustainable. In order to change our world, we need to change our lives first. Take the first step and BUY LESS.-Emily P.