

REVIEW OF STORY OF PLASTIC

By Cathi Lehn, Sustainable Cleveland Manager, City of Cleveland Mayor's Office of Sustainability

The Story of Stuff Project

The *Story of Plastic* is the [Story of Stuff Project's](#) first feature length documentary.

The Story of Stuff Project was founded in 2007 by Annie Leonard. The Project is an action-oriented organization and is probably best known for its many [short videos](#) starring stick figures. Their films include: *Where Does Your Trash End Up?*, *Story of Electronics*, *Story of Bottled Water*, *Story of Cosmetics*, and many more.

In 2014, for the Sustainable Cleveland Year of Zero Waste, Annie Leonard was our keynote speaker for the annual Summit.

Ms. Leonard is now the Executive Director of [Greenpeace](#).

Brief Overview

Plastic pollution is a problem not just for us here in the U.S., but across the globe. Plastic litters our environment, entangles and is digested by wildlife, contributes to climate change and impacts our health.

The *Story of Plastic* follows the entire lifecycle of plastic. That lifecycle starts with extraction, including fracking, and transportation, refining and manufacturing, and ends with use and disposal. The film emphasizes that there is pollution at every stage in the lifecycle of plastic and that the problems start well before a plastic item even gets to the consumer. Big Plastic is growing and continues to increase the production of plastic with plastic packaging is the biggest culprit in the waste stream. The solutions to date, promoted by the multinational producers of plastic, have emphasized the responsibility of the consumer and local governments to pick up litter/waste and recycle when available. However, this model has not been successful.



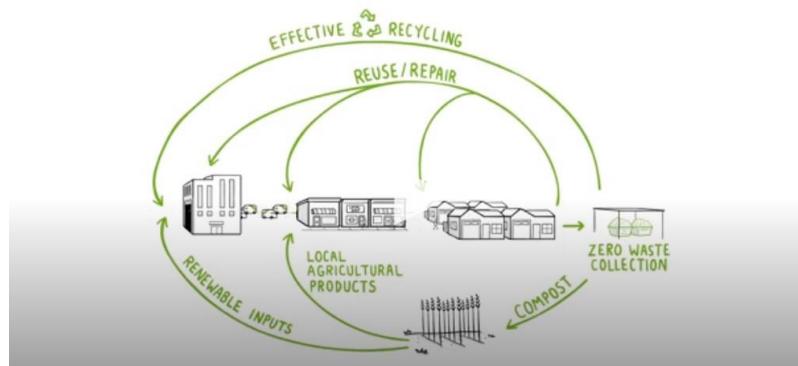
Recycling

As we learned in the film, recycling is not the solution to the plastic pollution mess.

Recycling has been promoted as being sexy and appealing by plastic producers and distributors and has been emphasized for many years over reduction and reuse. Even though recycling has been promoted as a solution since the 1970's, we haven't done a very good job of recycling with only 9% of all plastic waste being recycled.

The reality is that much of what we have thrown in the recycle bin has been recycled. Instead it has ended up in the landfill or in developing countries that have little or no infrastructure to manage waste.

The solution is to develop a circular economy and make producers responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products.



One step in that direction is the [Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act of 2020](#).

To learn more about recycling in the City of Cleveland visit [our blogs on the Sustainable Cleveland website](#).

TAKE ACTION

What actions can we take as individuals to address the problem of plastic pollution?

One suggestion is that as we are all reinventing our lifestyles during and after the pandemic, we need to also consider reinventing our relationship with plastic. This means as individuals we need to think differently about our habits and purchases and as a society we need to move towards a circular economy.

Here are just a few ideas for action:

- Lead by example by using reusable items instead of using single use products, e.g. plastic bags, straws, plastic utensils, etc.
- Donate to organizations doing good work (see the blog for some suggestions)
- Focus on REDUCE
- Adopt zero waste behaviors and solutions, e.g. bans, waste audits, composting
- Encourage businesses, large and small, to rethink packaging and disposal methods for their products
- Support legislation like the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Bill of 2020
- Join the Sustainable Cleveland Plastic Reduction or Zero Waste NEO Working Groups (contact Cathi Lehn (clehn@city.cleveland.oh.us) for more information)
- Become a Master Recycler with the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District
- Continue to educate yourself