The Story of Stuff Project and Free Range Studios with Corporate Accountability International, Polaris Institute, Environmental Working Group, Food & Water Watch, Pacific Institute present:

[Voice over]: This is a story about a world obsessed with stuff. It's a story about a system in crisis. We're trashing the planet, we're trashing each other and we're not even having fun. The good thing is that when we start to understand the system we start to see lots of places to step in and turn these problems into solutions.

**The Story of Bottled Water** with Annie Leonard

How “Manufactured Demand” pushes what we don’t need and destroys what we need most.

[Voice over]: One of the problems with trying to use less stuff is that sometimes we feel like we really need it. What if you live in a city like, say, Cleveland, and you want a glass of water. Are you going to take your chances and get it from the city tap? Or should you reach for a bottle of water that comes from the pristine rainforest of Fiji?

Well, Fuji brand water thought the answer to this question was obvious. So they built a whole ad campaign around it. It turned out to be one of the dumbest moves in advertising history.

You see the city of Cleveland didn't like being the butt of Fuji’s jokes so they did some tests and, guess what? These test showed a glass of Fuji water is lower quality, it loses taste tests against Cleveland tap, and cost thousands of times more.

This story is typical of what happens when you test bottled water against tap water. Is it cleaner? Sometimes, sometimes not. In many ways bottled water is less regulated than tap. Is it tastier? In taste tests across the country people consistently choose tap over bottled waster.

These bottled water companies say they’re just meeting consumer demand, but who would demand a less sustainable, less tasty, way more expensive product, especially one you can get almost free in your kitchen? Bottled water costs about 2000 times more than tap water. Can you imagine paying 2000 times the price of anything else? How about a $10,000 sandwich?
Yet people in the U.S. buy more than half a billion bottles of water every week. That's enough to circle the globe more than 5 times. How did this come to be? Well, it all goes back to how our materials economy works and one of its key drivers, which is known as manufactured demand.

If companies want to keep growing, they have to keep selling more and more stuff. In the 1970s giant soft drink companies got worried as they saw their growth projection start to level off. There's only so much soda a person can drink. Plus it wouldn't be long before people began realizing that soda is not that healthy and turned back to — gasp — drinking tap water.

Well, the companies found their next big idea in a silly designer product that most people laughed off as a passing yuppie fad. "Water is free," people said back then, "What will they sell us next, air?"

So how do you get people to buy this fringe product? Simple: You manufacture demand. How do you do that? Well, imagine you're in charge of a bottled water company. Since people aren't lining up to trade their hard earned money for your unnecessary product, you make them feel scared and insecure if they don't have it. And that's exactly what the bottled water industry did. One of their first marketing tactics was to scare people about tap water, with ads like Fiji's Cleveland campaign.

"When we're done," one top water exec said, "tap water will be relegated to showers and washing dishes."

Next, you hide the reality of your product behind images of pure fantasy. Have you ever noticed how bottled water tries to seduce us with pictures of mountain streams and pristine nature? But guess where a third of all bottled water in the U.S. actually comes from? The tap! Pepsi's Aquafina and Coke's Dasani are two of the many brands that are really filtered tap water.

But the pristine nature lie goes much deeper. In a recent full-page ad, Nestle said: "bottled water is the most environmentally responsible consumer product in the world. " What? They're trashing the environment all along the product's life cycle. Exactly how is that environmentally responsible?

The problems start here with extraction and production where oil is used to make water bottles. Each year, making the plastic water bottles used in the U.S. takes enough oil and energy to fuel a million cars.
All that energy spent to make the bottle, even more to ship it around the planet, and then we drink it in about two minutes? That brings us to the big problem at the other end of life the cycle – disposal.

What happens to all these bottles when we're done? 80% end up in landfills, where they will sit for thousands of years, or in incinerators, where they are burned, releasing toxic pollution. The rest gets collected for recycling.

I was curious about where the plastic bottles that I put in recycling bins go. I found out that shiploads were being sent to India. So, I went there. I will never forget riding over a hill outside Madras where I came face to face with a mountain of plastic bottles from California. Real recycling would turn these bottles back into bottles. But that wasn't what was happening here. Instead these bottles were slated to be down cycled, which means turning them into lower quality products that would just be chucked later. The parts that couldn't be down cycled were thrown away there; shipped all the way to India just to be dumped in someone else's backyard.

If bottled water companies want to use mountains on their labels, it would be more accurate to show on of those mountains of plastic waste.

Scaring us, seducing us, and misleading us – these strategies are all core parts of manufacturing demand.

Once they've manufactured all this demand, creating a new multibillion-dollar market, they defend it by beating out the competition. But in this case, the competition is our basic human right to clean, safe drinking water.

Pepsi’s Vice Chairman publicly said, "the biggest enemy is tap water!" They want us to think it’s dirty and bottled water is the best alternative.

In many places, public water is polluted thanks to polluting industries like the plastic bottle industry! And these bottled water guys are all too happy to offer their expensive solutions, which keeps us hooked on their product.s

It's time we took back the tap.
That starts with making a personal commitment to not buy or drink bottled water unless the water in your community is truly unhealthy. Yes, it takes a bit of foresight to grab a reusable bottle on the way out, but I think we can handle it.

Then take the next step – join a campaign that's working for real solutions, like demanding investments in clean tap water for all. In the US, tap water is underfunded by twenty-four billion dollars partly because people believe drinking water only comes from a bottle! Around the world, a billion people don't have access to clean water right now. Yet cities all over are spending millions of dollars to deal with all the plastic bottles we throw out. What if that money was spent improving our water systems or better yet, preventing pollution to begin with?

There are many more things we can do to solve this problem. Lobby your city officials to bring back drinking fountains. Work to ban the purchase of bottled water by your school, organization or entire city.

This is a huge opportunity for millions of people to wake up and protect our wallets, our health and the planet. The good news is: it's already started.

Bottled water sales have begun to drop while business is booming for safe refillable water bottles. Yay!

Restaurants are proudly serving tap and people are choosing to pocket the hundreds or thousands of dollars they would otherwise be wasting on bottled water. Carrying bottled water is on its way to being as cool as smoking while pregnant. We know better now.

The bottled water industry is getting worried because the jig is up. We're not buying into their manufactured demand anymore. We will choose our own demands, thank you very much, and we're demanding clean safe water for all.

www.storyofbottledwater.org

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