

### **The Story of Stuff:**

Where does our stuff come from and where does it go? This is called Extraction to production to distribution to consumption to disposal.

**Extraction:** Fancy word for natural resource exploitation which is a fancy word for trashing the planet. What this looks like is we chop down trees, we blow up mountains to get the metals inside, we use up all the water and we wipe out the animals. So here we are running up against our first limit. We're running out of resources.

**Production:** So, next, the materials move to "production" and what happens there is we use energy to mix toxic chemicals in with the natural resources to make toxic contaminated products.

**Distribution:** So, what happens after all these resources are turned into products? Well, it moves here, for distribution. Now distribution means "selling all this toxic contaminated junk as quickly as possible." The goal here is to keep the prices down, keep the people buying and keep the inventory moving.

How do they keep the prices down? Well, they don't pay the store workers very much and skimp on health insurance every time they can. It's all about externalizing the costs. What that means is the real costs of making stuff aren't captured in the price. In other words, we aren't really paying for the stuff we buy.

**Consumption:** The golden arrow of consumption. Victor Lebow said "Our enormously productive economy . . . demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption . . . we need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate."

**Planned obsolescence:** is another word for "designed for the dump."<sup>50</sup> It means they actually make stuff that is designed to be useless as quickly as possible so we will chuck it and go buy a new one. It's obvious with stuff like plastic bags and coffee cups, but now it's even big stuff: mops, DVDs, cameras, barbecues even<sup>51</sup>, everything!

**Perceived obsolescence:** Now perceived obsolescence convinces us to throw away stuff that is still perfectly useful. How do they do that? Well, they change the way the stuff looks so if you bought your stuff a couple years ago, everyone can tell that you haven't contributed to this arrow recently and since the way we demonstrate our value is by contributing to this arrow, it can be embarrassing.

**Disposal:** It all goes out in the garbage. And that brings us to disposal. This is the part of the materials economy we all know the most because we have to haul the junk out to the curb ourselves. All of this garbage [stuff we bought] either gets dumped in a landfill, which is just a big hole in the ground, or if you're really unlucky, first it's burned in an incinerator and then dumped in a landfill.

**Another way:** Because what we really need to chuck is this old-school throw-away mindset. There's a new school of thinking on this stuff and it's based on sustainability and equity: Green Chemistry,<sup>81</sup> Zero Waste,<sup>82</sup> Closed Loop Production,<sup>83</sup> Renewable Energy,<sup>84</sup> Local living Economies.<sup>85</sup> It's already happening.