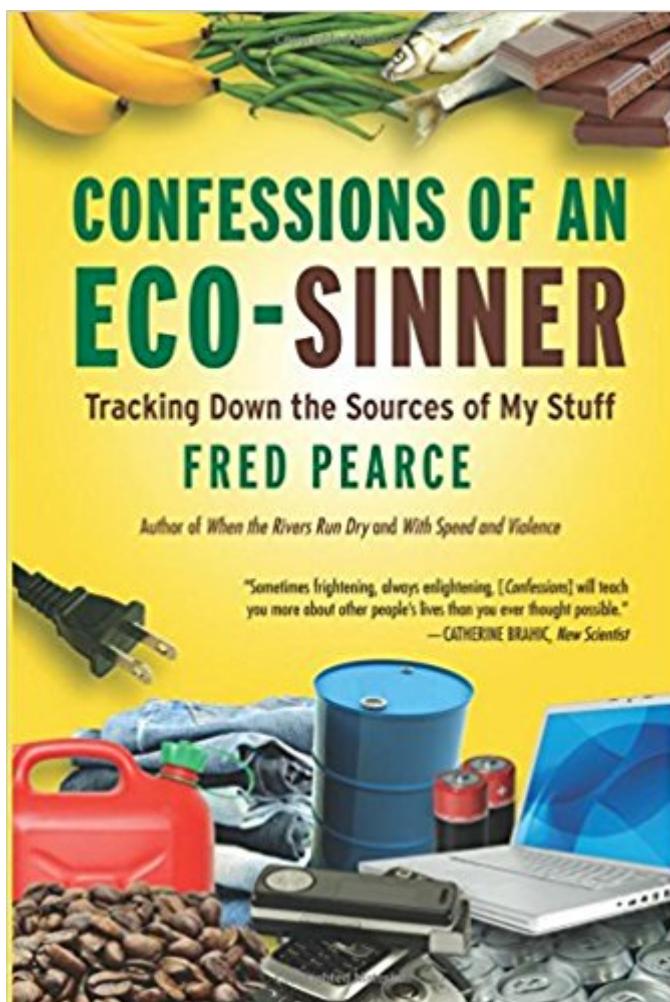


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# Confessions Of An Eco-Sinner: Tracking Down The Sources Of My Stuff



## Synopsis

A 2008 Indie Next Pick In Confessions of an Eco-Sinner, Fred Pearce surveys his home and then sets out to track down the people behind the production and distribution of everything in his daily life, from his socks to his computer to the food in his fridge. It's a fascinating portrait, by turns sobering and hopeful, of the effects the world's more than six billion inhabitants have on our planet and of the working and living conditions of the people who produce most of these goods.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Pearce's quest to discover the hidden world sustaining Western consumption habits is fulfilled with varying degrees of success in this, his third book. Tracking the routes taken by the items in his home—his coffee, cellphone, computer, green beans, chocolate, socks—from raw ingredient to finished product, the author presents fascinating firsthand investigations, as when he visits a group of fair-trade coffee farmers, follows the trail of his donated shirts to markets in Africa, visits Uzbek communities whose health, infrastructure and environment have been devastated by the cotton industry, and interviews female sweatshop workers who view their factory jobs as empowering.

When Pearce strays from these journalistic portraits, however, he is prone to flaccid opining about the greenest fuel sources and simplistic boosting for urban planners designing small-footprint cities. The most effective chapters puncture the feel-good myths surrounding fair trade and recycling and introduce unique characters, such as the farmers and middlemen responsible for getting prawns from Bangladesh to a London curry shop. Although a timely effort, Pearce's diffusion of his

reportorial mission with green-pleading mires his refreshing discoveries in moralizing and familiar cant. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

After addressing climate change in *With Speed and Violence* (2007), London-based journalist Pearce joins the growing ranks of the curious and intrepid who are determined to dispel the fog of globalization and find out exactly where our food and belongings come from, where our trash goes, and how this complicated cycle impacts the planet. Vitally interested in the lives of the people who extract, process, and cultivate the materials, plants, and animals that clothe, shelter, and feed us, Pearce begins his far-ranging inquiry by tracing his gold wedding band to an immense South African gold mine. Unsettling conversations with coffee and cocoa farmers, an up-close view of the fish crisis, and exposés of the environmental havoc wrought by the surging palm-oil industry and the high human and natural costs of cotton and aluminum — “everywhere his favorite foods, clothes, and gadgets lead him, Pearce is confronted by imbalance and waste, tyranny and greed. And yet the sheer ingenuity of people • infuses him with optimism. An uneven yet engaging and informative report on the consequences of overconsumption. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The author writes about the history of where the things he consumes come from and the environmental damage it does along the way. It is an interesting look at how far many of our items come and under what conditions they are produced. There is a lot of focus on the clothes we wear. Do you know where the cotton in your clothes comes from, or how it is grown? In many cases, the cotton comes from thousands of miles away and leaves ecological damage in its wake. It is a thirsty crop and one that requires heavy use of chemicals, damaging the area around which it is grown. And, then it is shipped thousands of miles to be made into the tee shirt or whatever that you are wearing, before that is shipped to your local store. A tee shirt may have 20,000 miles of transport behind it before you ever see it. The same issues occur with computers, cell phones, a lot of food we eat, beer cans and other packaging. The list goes on and on. Many of the items he uncovers we can do little about — we can't change where our cell phones are made, but we can keep them longer and make sure they are properly recycled when we are done with them. This is an interesting and well written book about where our "stuff" comes from and the damage it has left in its wake. If we do even a little better at buying locally, or keeping items a little longer, we can have a significant impact on the planet Earth.

I've read this book a few times over- it's a great read

Great book!!

Excellent book with full tracing of products!

This book explains so many mysteries, it connects the world, helps create consciousness. We don't see all these connections but it doesn't mean they aren't there

I love this book. It did a great job making me think about all of my consumption of stuff on both an environmental and humanitarian aspect. I'm always a sucker for a well-written book with a good message. Maybe we should consume less stuff, more mindfully and more competently...then feed it back through the chain instead of burying it in a landfill. I love the ending. It gives me much hope that NOW is the time and we are the generation that can and WILL save not only this planet, but our own species as well.

If you ever wondered where the stuff you use comes from, the next best thing to you getting on the plane and tracing them is reading this book. It is well written and gives a lot of valuable information about what goes on outside our known world.

At each location, from a sweatshop in Bangladesh to a waste disposal unit, to coffee, cotton, bean and banana farms, Pearce finds out that things we take for granted are not quite what they seem. By putting a story to some of the things that we think so little of Pearce forces us to look at all of our consumer choices. Even those who consider themselves to have some eco-smarts will learn a lot. Pearce does not judge or preach, he just relays the information in an honest and forthright manner. The result is a riveting, well-written and witty account of the origin of some of the common objects in people's homes. I will provide a brief example of one of his stories. This is the story he starts with, the story of his wedding band: Pearce treks the gold trail from the wedding band on his finger to a goldmine in South Africa. Driefontein mine shaft 7, 3 miles underground, is the deepest workplace on this planet. In 1970 his wedding band cost him \$50. The ecological cost was: 2 tons of rock (1 ton per 5 grams of gold) blasted from the ground and carried up more than 2 miles, 5.5 tons of water, 30 tons of air pumped underground to keep the mine cool, cyanide, zinc, mercury, and other

chemicals for extraction of the gold, and enough energy to run a house for several days. He also goes on to detail the social cost of gold mining. His ring cost 10 hours of human labor at just \$1 per hour. Yet the danger to the miners is difficult to include in the equation. Driefontein mine shaft 7 is a very productive mine shaft. And so the miners dig deeper and deeper to get more gold. The deeper they they dig the more dangerous, the hotter and more radioactive the mine becomes. (This part reminded me of the Mines of Moria from Lords of the Rings. Of how the dwarves dug so deep that they awakened the Balrog of Morgoth... Yes, I'm a nerd.) Rockfalls, fires, and other accidents cause death on a regular basis. The miners live in squatter camps near the goldfields and lead dreary lives. AIDS is common among them, with prevalence rates as high as 35 percent. Hollywood showed us what a "blood diamond" is. But what about blood gold? Judging from the title of the book and the cover image, one would assume that this book is written for the environmentalist. The choice of the title is unfortunate in that the contents of the book tell another and more far-reaching story. Pearce's personal journey reads like a travelogue that specializes in the environmental and ethical dimensions of many aspects of our material lives. This book is written to open our eyes to the fact that we of the West are all "eco-sinners." What is even more alarming is that the our irrational desires for material goods are spreading across the globe. For instance, a female sweatshop worker he meets in Bangladesh owns a fake Gucci bag. It would appear that we are trashing the planet because we are trying to encourage economic growth, and the way to do this is to encourage aspiration. In the west, we are already rich and aspirational. But as the third world catches up with our levels of prosperity, how will we cope? The system we are in requires servant labor. Even the sweatshop laborer, a poor young woman living in a small hut with five other women, buys a product of sweatshop because of its' label. Our Western lust for material goods is spreading and infecting people across the planet. Perhaps this book can be invaluable in attacking the disease at the source. Perhaps if we realized the true cost (social and ecological) of our everyday products we would care for them more, make them last longer. After reading this book I personally have become more conscious of the purchasing decisions I make. After learning the true cost of a cotton t-shirt I feel wrong buying one, no matter how cheap it is. For the first time I visited consignment boutiques and learned the joy of thrift shopping. Perhaps I am not saving the world with my consumer decisions, but I will try not to make things worse.

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