

[Mobile pdf] Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves

# Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves

*Andrew Szasz*

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**Andrew Szasz : Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves:

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Shopping Our Way to Safety: NO More!By Pam RogersI worry

about my family's health. I buy organic food, I use "green" cleaning products, and I buy bottled water. But I have always had an uncomfortable feeling that these choices were woefully inadequate to protect them and the planet we inhabit. Reading "Shopping Our Way to Safety" showed me how my efforts are "sold" to me, along with the belief that I can protect my family by being a conscientious consumer. Szasz explains that individual consumption not only doesn't make us safer, it masks the true problems of the toxins that fill our environment. What will make a difference is when we all work together to impact policy changes to address these huge problems. After reading the book, I notice examples of Szasz's theory of the inverted quarantine everyday. Yesterday, and I am NOT making this up, I saw a TV ad for a product that removes toxins from your body through the bottom of your feet while you sleep! "Shopping Our Way to Safety" gave me a framework to understand how we got into this environmental mess and how we can get out of it. It is easy to read and filled with a fascinating history of how many of us came to believe that we could ignore the rest of society while imagining that we could protect ourselves. Szasz never pontificates nor slams you with dense sociological theory. He does explain the race and class dimensions of the problem and gives you plenty of sources for more information. Easy to understand. After reading this book, I donated money to my local environmental justice group and our state-wide occupational health and safety organization. I plan to work with both of them to protect people from workplace toxins and to demand cleaner air, cleaner water, and non-toxic food and goods, not only for my family but for all of us.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The limitations of consumerism

By Malvin

"Shopping Our Way to Safety" by Andrew Szasz offers an unique perspective on environmental sociology. Mr. Szasz is a professor and award-winning author whose exemplary writing skills combine to produce an immensely informative yet highly readable text. Mr. Szasz introduces the term 'inverted quarantine' to describe how Americans have increasingly sought to shield themselves from sociological and environmental dangers through the act of consumption. Mr. Szasz's original and thought-provoking analysis reveals a number of valuable lessons to be learned by environmentalists and others who may be seeking insight into American society. To organize the discussion, Mr. Szasz splits the book into three sections. First, he recounts two case studies to illustrate inverted quarantine in action in American history; second, he examines how problems associated with drinking, eating and breathing have opened up opportunities for the marketers of inverted quarantine products; and third, he assesses the consequences for society when the masses engage in inverted quarantine behavior. Comparing and contrasting the individual versus the collective, Mr. Szasz contends that the ordinary citizen's fear of racial tensions, pollution and crime contributed greatly to the rise of the suburbs and the decay of inner cities (to the detriment of American society and culture). On the other hand, Mr. Szasz discusses how the fallout shelter panic of 1961 highlighted the impossibility of individual escape from nuclear annihilation; which subsequently helped the U.S. and USSR achieve detente. The takeaway is that individualism tends to fray society; whereas collective action solves big problems. With this insight, Mr. Szasz goes on to alert us to the myriad chemical and biological hazards in our drinking water, food and air. Corporations have exploited our insecurities to their benefit while sometimes offering little protection to us or the environment. For example, Mr. Szasz excoriates the bottled water industry for its shoddy product quality and massive environmental footprint; big agriculture for its careless use of antibiotics, growth hormones, and genetically modified seeds; and the personal hygiene industry for sometimes playing fast and loose with the ingredients that are used in their products. Mr. Szasz believes that most consumers are not aware of the degree to which they are being poisoned; but to the extent that a growing segment of the consumer market engages in the inverted quarantine behavior of buying products that are perceived to be healthier or less harmful, they frequently do not obtain the full benefits that have been promised. Mr. Szasz astutely notes the consequences. As a sizeable portion of the populace believes itself to be immune from social ills through adoption of the inverted quarantine strategy, the political will to meaningfully address large social issues is dramatically reduced. But no matter what one might wish, the individual will fare no better surviving an environmental meltdown caused by global warming than surviving a nuclear holocaust. Therefore, Mr. Szasz suggests that environmentalists must begin to more aggressively highlight the limitations of consumerism in order to build greater support for developing a more durable social-movement solution to the environmental crisis. Collectively, we can help ensure a better future for all.

I highly recommend this outstanding book to everyone.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An Interesting Unique Read

By BProfessor Szasz is a great professor and a wonderful writer. His writings on the sociological impact of shopping and how it is intertwined with the environment is something that everyone must understand.

Not long ago, people did not worry about the food they ate. They did not worry about the water they drank or the air they breathed. It never occurred to them that eating, drinking water, satisfying basic, mundane bodily needs might be a dangerous thing to do. Parents thought it was good for their kids to go outside, get some sun.

That's all changed now.

from the Introduction

Many Americans today rightly fear that they are constantly exposed to dangerous toxins in their immediate environment: tap water is contaminated with chemicals; foods contain pesticide residues, hormones, and antibiotics; even the air we breathe, outside and indoors, carries invisible poisons. Yet we have responded not by pushing for governmental regulation, but instead by shopping. What accounts for this swift and

dramatic response?nbsp; And what are its unintended consequences?nbsp;Andrew Szasz examines this phenomenon in *Shopping Our Way to Safety*. Within a couple of decades, he reveals, bottled water and water filters, organic food, "green" household cleaners and personal hygiene products, and "natural" bedding and clothing have gone from being marginal, niche commodities to becoming mass consumer items. Szasz sees these fatalistic, individual responses to collective environmental threats as an inverted form of quarantine, aiming to shut the healthy individual in and the threatening world out.nbsp;Sharply critiquing these products' effectiveness as well as the unforeseen political consequences of relying on them to keep us safe from harm, Szasz argues that when consumers believe that they are indeed buying a defense from environmental hazards, they feel less urgency to actually do something to fix them.nbsp; To achieve real protection, real security, he concludes, we must give up the illusion of individual solutions and together seek substantive reform.nbsp;Andrew Szasz is professor and chair of the department of sociology at the University of California at Santa Cruz and author of the award-winning *EcoPopulism* (Minnesota, 1994).

About the AuthorAndrew Szasz is professor and chair of the sociology department at the University of California at Santa Cruz and author of the award-winning *EcoPopulism* (Minnesota, 1994).