

Keeping Safe Water Safe

Greif, Inc. and CEO David Fischer Work with Partner NGOs to Bring a Billion People a Better Way to Transport Water

IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD, WE EXPECT OUR LIGHTS TO TURN ON with the flick of a switch. We expect our furnaces to keep our homes warm in the winter and our air-conditioners to keep us cool in the summer. We expect our appliances to do their jobs – laundering, dish washing, cooking, freezing.

And we expect our water to run hot and cold – at any temperature we desire – from every tap in the house. Of course, it's clean.

Could we survive if we were to be stripped of our conveniences? Probably. Could we thrive? Probably not.

Most of our conveniences are actually luxuries that we now take for granted. For eons, humans have lived well without electric lights, dishwashers, washing machines, microwave ovens, and refrigerators.

Our ancestors even got by without water piped into their homes.

Today, nearly a billion people on our planet are still getting by without piped water at home. In underdeveloped regions, women and children are trekking long distances to fetch water. They are carrying it home in plastic jerry cans and buckets that may have held gasoline, pesticides or other noxious chemicals. They are carrying 40 pounds of water on their heads, in their hands or roped to their backs in rigid containers that brutally challenge every step.

They are getting sick from drinking the water, losing time at work or at school, spending precious money on medicine...or dying. And the children are the most vulnerable.

Greif, Inc.'s CEO David Fischer has seen firsthand the physical hardship of transporting water in filthy, rigid containers. With his background in chemistry, he knew that even if accessed from a "safe" source, the water could become contaminated in transport, and compromise the health of everyone who consumes it.

So he did something about it. He brought the resources of Greif – a global leader in the manufacture of industrial packaging – to bear to create and produce PackH2O, a for-purpose designed backpack that carries 20 liters of water ergonomically and keeps safe water safe during transport.

Reusable again and again, and easily sanitized, PackH2O is a simple solution that has been recognized as one of the most revolutionary innovations in providing for the estimated one billion world citizens without easy access to water. It was designed so that it could be priced at \$10, which covers material, labor, and distribution costs.

In October, PackH2O won the 2013 People's Design Award, presented by the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum and *Smithsonian* magazine.

Popular Science magazine, which gave the water backpack its Award for Innovative Design, called PackH2O "an elegant solution to a problem faced by millions of people: how to transport drinking water" in its 25th annual Best of What's New roundup.



Global Green USA recognized PackH2O with the Industrial Design Award in its 13th annual Sustainable Design Awards, singling out products that promote both design innovation and environmental responsibility.

Awards are nice, but the proof is on the ground. Greif has partnered with charities and NGOs, donating its work and thousands of backpacks to families and communities in need.

Greif works through organizations such as Partners for Care, which brings the PackH2O to Kenya, including Marurui Slum near Nairobi. PFC not only hands out backpacks, but provides the education on how to fill them properly, how to clean them, and how to test that the water going in is safe. They then conduct follow up surveys to be sure each PackH2O is being used correctly, and to document its effectiveness in reducing water-borne illnesses.

Everywhere Partners for Care distributes the new packs, people love them, the NGO reports. People tell them the water stays cool in the pack. Their children no longer dip their cups for a drink; the water runs from the built-in spigot. Their surveys indicate that the pack is indeed reducing incidents of water-borne illness.

One man walked six hours to Marurui to see how he could get a backpack. He spoke to the area chief who directed him to the medical clinic established by Partners for Care. He didn't take time to greet the staff; he just asked how he could get a water pack. And he wouldn't leave until his mission was accomplished. He said, "I want to be free from this kind of sickness and use the money I have been using for medication to educate my children."



This story is repeated in some form or other with every backpack handed out. Backpacks have been distributed in dozens of countries including Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Mexico, the Philippines, and Uganda.

Once the water backpack is introduced into a community with the attendant education, demand follows. The ultimate vision is to create micro-businesses on the ground. Women will be able to buy the pack in kits, sew and decorate them, and sell them for a small profit.

"To be sustainable, this can't be a hand-out," Fischer says. "It has to be a hand-up. We know we are making lives easier. We are even helping to save lives through education about safe water, and providing the means to keep safe water safe.

"But we also have the opportunity to build futures. We can't walk away from this."

More information about the backpack itself can be found at PackH2O.com. Corporations and individuals can help change lives by contributing to PartnersforCare.org. One \$10 donation will buy one backpack that will help a family. \$100 will help a school. \$1,000 will help a village. ●

