

# Global Water Crisis “Water Commons” Lab

Most of the world’s valuable resources, water included, are treated as “commons” where individuals, corporations and governments have the right to freely consume them and return their wastes.

A “tragedy of the water commons” occurs when one person’s/institution’s wastes affects another person’s/institution’s access to safe, clean drinking water.

## Pre-Activity Questions:

1. Where does the tap water in your home come from?
2. Where does your family’s used water go?
3. What possible pollutants may enter the water “commons” from your home?

## Materials:

- One aluminum pie pan per group
- Regular M&M’s
- Peanut M&M’s
- One spoon for each person
- One plastic/paper cup for each person

## Procedure:

1. Your group will start at the first station in the river (upstream). Put 100 regular M&M’s in the pie pan. These represent the clean water from the river.
2. All group members must close their eyes or wear blindfolds. The teacher will carefully time the collection of “water” within a 30-second time frame.
3. Using the spoon as your pail, collect as many M&M’s as you can, keeping your eyes closed (no cheaters!), and place them in the cup.
4. After the 30 seconds is up, count how many M&M’s are left in the pan. **Once this number is counted, subtract it from 100, and put that number of peanut M&Ms in the pan.** The peanut M&M’s will represent the polluted water. Record the information in the chart.
5. Repeat steps 2-4 for each station in the river, or until no “water” is left.

## Station Clean Water Polluted Water

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

**Questions:**

- 1. How many stations did your group make it through before the resource ran out?**
- 2. How does the pollution from the stations upstream affect stations located downstream?**
- 3. What was the ratio of clean water to polluted water for each station? (Ratio = number of regular M&M's to number of peanut M&M's)**
- 4. What is meant by the phrase, "We all live downstream"?**
- 5. Research existing protections for freshwater sources at the local, national and international level. Report findings to your class.**