

Doing Away with Disposable Clothing

Why we care

Clothing has become very inexpensive to produce and to buy. In 2002, the average consumer bought 52 items of apparel compared to 42 in 1996. At the same time, the fashion industry has moved from introducing two collections a year to introducing new pieces every month, encouraging consumers to buy un-needed clothing. What do we do with all these new clothes? Unfortunately, we throw them away at a rate of 68 pounds per person per year. What we don't throw away often gets sent overseas. In a 15-year period, American exports of used clothing more than tripled, often undermining local clothing producers. Globalization has allowed the clothing industry to look for cheap labor overseas where workers are easily exploited and where environmental regulations are lax. The manufacture of synthetic fabrics is a chemical- and energy-intensive process; yet growing cotton is insecticide and water intensive. Toxic chemicals are used to bleach, dye and print textiles and make them "wrinkle free."

Simple, positive change

- Purchase fewer and more durable garments. Choose timeless rather than trendy designs.
- Shop at resale stores.
- Organize a clothing swap with family or friends.
- Donate or consign unwanted clothing.
- Give clothing that can't be worn to a thrift store, such as Goodwill. Scraps are sorted and used for rags or recycled into fiber-based products.
- Choose fabrics that have less environmental impact such as organic cotton, linen, hemp, bamboo, and recycled polyester fleece.
- Avoid "wrinkle-free" garments.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.