

## **Clothing Causes Climate Change. Lifestyle Changes can Reduce the Impact.**

From Levi and H&M to Patagonia and Gucci, brands are starting to create more sustainable clothing. With production of cotton for a single pair of jeans using as much water as a person drinks in 10 years and 65 percent of clothing being made of oil-based polymers, however, clothing could keep causing climate change for decades. The key to sustainability is consumers reducing their environmental impact with an eco-friendly approach to their clothes.

### **Clothing is not Sustainable**

Indeed, the impact of fashion on climate change is enormous.

100 billion garments are produced globally each year, according to Monash University researchers Aleasha McCallion and Julie Boulton, and 33 percent go to landfill within the first year of purchase. And with 65 percent of clothing being polymer-based, University of Glasgow researcher Lynn Wilson told the BBC that about 70 million barrels of oil are used to produce those clothes.

From producing the fabric and dyeing the colours to shipping clothes for retailers and selling them online or in stores, that clothing has environmental impacts. The fashion industry generates up to 8 percent of the world's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to the United Nations. Water usage is also high, BBC writer Christine Ro observed, since producing even just the kilogramme of cotton needed for one pair of jeans requires 7,500–10,000 litres of water, about 10 years' worth of drinking water for one person. Moreover, the fashion industry accounts for nearly 20 percent of wastewater globally. As much as 40 percent of the clothing that is purchased is never worn. And even though most clothes are recyclable, researchers at Cornell University found that only 2.3 million out of the 14.3 million tons of textile waste generated each year is recycled.

### **Some Brands and Regions are Trying**

To mitigate the impact, increasing numbers of fashion brands are using environmentally friendly practices.

Patagonia, for instance, has long been known for its sustainable practices. It uses sustainable materials in its clothing, helps customers repair their clothes instead of buying new items, follows fair-trade practices, monitors its supply chain for sustainability and encourages customers to recycle their Patagonia clothing or purchase items second-hand.

Some other brands, including big global ones and tiny local ones, are also changing their practices. The Water<Less™ fabric that Levi's launched in 2015, for example, uses 65 percent less water than traditional indigo rope dyeing. Levi's followed up in 2016 with a non-denim fabric process that results in 100 percent fixation of the dye to the fabric and uses 60 percent less water than traditional pad-steam non-denim fabric dyeing.

H&M collaborated with the Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel to develop the Green Machine, technology that can recycle blend textiles without any quality loss and that it sells at cost to textile manufacturers in markets such as Indonesia and Turkey.

In some regions, support for better practices may come from regulators. In Europe, for example, the European Commission has proposed a Roadmap that includes investments in sustainable production processes, materials, infrastructure and capacity as well as innovative textiles, tackling the release of microplastics, new technologies for manufacturing and recycling.

Given the scale of the environmental impact from clothing production and the tiny impact that a small number of well-intentioned firms seems likely to have in reducing the effects, changes in corporate practices are unlikely to solve the problem. And while upscale consumers may pay extra for eco-conscious clothes, another issue for many people is affordability.

### **Consumer Behaviour is the Critical Catalyst**

Instead of waiting for the fashion industry to change, consumers can collectively have an even bigger impact by making small changes in their lifestyle and behaviours to reduce the impact of the fashion industry on the climate.

The change starts with shopping. When you buy clothes, an easy way to reduce the carbon footprint is to buy only what you really need and intend to keep.

Rather than buying new clothing, purchasing high-quality second-hand goods is far more environmentally friendly. Companies such as Rent the Runway in the US and Refash or Carousell in Singapore have selections ranging from fast fashion to designer gowns.

When you do order, certifications such as the Better Cotton Initiative, Global Organic Textile Standard or Bluesign can help indicate how green the clothing is.

The number of times you wear and wash your clothing can also make a big difference. Purchasing higher-quality clothing and wearing it more often as well as keeping it longer is “the not-so-secret weapon for combatting the carbon footprint from your garments,” Ro suggests. Consumer Reports writer Laura Murphy suggests extending the life of your clothes from the typical average of two years to three years or longer by selecting higher-quality, well-made clothing and laundering it carefully.

When you finally get rid of the clothing, you can sell or recycle it rather than dumping it in the trash.

### **Individual Action makes a Difference**

It might seem like one person or even a family changing their fashion lifestyle would make little difference. Each of us can play a part, though, and collectively can help reduce climate change. Using social media to encourage others to change can be a catalyst for even greater impact. As renowned conservationist Jane Goodall said, “What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”