Fashionistas Beware!

Like many other women, and some men too, I have participated in a life-long love of fashionable clothes. Yes, it makes me feel good to wear something shiny and brand new, but I have recently realized that the “Throw it Away - Buy the Latest” mindset is bad for the environment. My fashion hasn’t always been cheap, but, as discussed below, my closet and drawers probably contain way more than I need to stay warm or cool. And, of course, I’m not the only one!

The $2.4 trillion apparel industry has evolved rapidly over the past 20 years. Cheap production and lowered costs for consumers along with the influence of social media, has produced an avalanche of cheap clothing. "Fast fashion" production is based on a model of ‘take-make-waste’ designed for a short life before landfill.

Textiles are disposed of in landfills or incinerated; apparel companies conservatively produce 100 billion garments per year; **less than 1% of clothing is recycled.**  40 tons of textiles (87% of clothing) is landfilled or incinerated. The industry is responsible for 10% of all carbon emissions. Textile processing consumes 20% of the Earth’s freshwater. It pollutes rivers, streams and ground water with high levels of pesticides and harsh chemicals, many of which are carcinogenic. 60% of all clothing is made of polyester and contains microplastics. Washing garments made of polyester and other synthetics accounts for 35% of the ocean’s microplastics. Thanks to Earthday.org for these statistics.

To add insult to injury, fashion companies "greenwash" their clothing by making false claims of sustainable fabrics and methods of production. The true "sustainable" efforts made by brands and retailers are minimal, but growing.

We citizens of Nevada County can learn new methods of making our personal fashion more sustainable and ethical. How you spend your money is literally a fashion statement. My WasteNot! friend, Star Carroll, provided some interesting information on how we might want to get started.

<https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/eco-friendly-clothing-brands>

<https://www.teva.com/tevaforever/>

<https://fordays.com/products/take-back-bag?variant=38181640667288>

<https://www.rei.com/rei-garage>

Patagonia takes back your old items to refurbish and sell as Worn Wear. Also, H&M clothing stores have a clothing recycle box (doesn't have to be their brand). Check out ThredUp.com/gap – they will take gently used women’s or kids’ clothing. Repairing, Repurposing and donating are other options.

Citizens alone are not able to regulate fast fashion, though we can reduce our clothing footprint by consuming less. Government needs to do its job as well. Regulations could help by:

* Promoting legislation that will hold the fashion industry responsible for cutting emissions, disposing of used materials sustainably, limiting the use of virgin synthetic materials, and clearly labeling whether the clothing they make is truly sustainable per the Fair Trade Commission’s Green Guide.
* Imposing a 'carbon' tax on all clothing made from virgin synthetic materials.
* Mandating that every new clothing washing machine has a filter installed to capture plastic microfibers.
* Restricting the manufacture, import and export of clothing containing harmful chemicals/substances.
* Eliminating unfair practices for apparel workers working below minimum wage or for piecework in unsafe factories and create multilateral accountability holding not only factories but brands liable for unsafe conditions and unpaid wages.
* Banning the importation of clothing made with indentured servitude or child labor.
* Educating consumers on how to effectively recycle used clothing (see below).

Looking at our wardrobes with new eyes for what will be Eco-friendly can be part of Spring cleaning – and fun to research new ideas that will be Regenerative.

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