FAST & FATAL

Just as fast food is bad for your health, fast fashion—mass-produced clothes that tend to get replaced quickly—is bad for the planet’s health. Your last buy from retail or online shops could be making the problem worse.

The clothing and textile industry as a whole contributes 8 to 10 per cent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, while 20 per cent of industrial waste water pollution worldwide originates from the industry, based on statistics from the United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion.

And while you may be swopping plastic straws for a reusable metal straw to fight plastic waste and pollution, you may not realise that some clothes also contain microplastics that end up in the world’s oceans. Microplastics, which are plastic particles under 5mm in size, are considered particularly problematic because their miniscule size makes them hard to remove from oceans and they can also enter the food chain as fish ingest them. A 2017 report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature said that 90 per cent of primary microplastics entering the oceans come from land-based activities.

One of the chief culprits is the washing of synthetic textiles, for instance, materials such as polyester or nylon which are made from chemicals as opposed to those made from plant-based fibres. For all the resources that go into making clothing and the pollution that result from the processes, many clothes end up being tossed.

Worldwide, one garbage truck worth of textiles is dumped into a landfill or incinerated every second, based on a report by UK charity, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. Singapore, too, has a high-waste problem. Last year, the country produced 275,850 tonnes of textiles and leather waste, of which only 6 per cent were recycled, based on National Environment Agency waste recycling statistics.

SOAKING UP WATER

The water footprint of a product is calculated by adding up the water use—a product’s entire water footprint throughout the supply chain. For 1kg of jeans weighing 1kg:

- 10,000 litres of water (30 standard bathtubs full)
- 9,710 litres of virtual water (152 standard bathtubs full)
- A T-shirt weighing 200g: 2,720 litres of virtual water (45 bathtubs full)


Raising consciousness about consumption

A group of 10 Yale-NUS students has been packing throwaway clothes in washers at a university loo to collect unworn clothes from their peers andorgenising pop-up thrift stores. So far, they have organised the pop-ups thrice on campus, and once at The Red Box at Somerset.

“[This] is to promote second-hand clothing, which is more environmentally friendly than buying new clothes and buying new ones. Calling themselves Conscious Living Collective, the group was formed in August last year. Founder Tammy Dan, 21, said that a friend got her interested in the zero waste movement, and she learnt more from attending a zero waste event organised by the National Youth Council.

But it was watching The True Cost, a documentary about the supply chain of the textile industry, that inspired her to act.

It was so ground-breaking for me because I was a complete capitalist consumer... I would buy all these clothes and I didn’t realise that it would be so bad for other people,” she said, adding that she used to buy fast fashion clothes monthly.

She rounded up friends who also wanted to do something about promoting sustainable fashion. Their original idea was to create candles to raise awareness of the cause involved in the production of various items of clothing, but they decided they would instead donate clothes to the thrift store.

They held their first pop-up thrift store. “By giving to people’s rooms to get clothes, we got that many clothes,” she said. Going forward, the collective wants to do more by organising a fair to showcase people who make their own things, and to also encourage individuals to voice their environmental concerns by organising a workshop about how they can write to businesses and government officials.

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