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# FAST FASHION: CROP TO TRASH

Why this is a problem, and how to fix it



Of all the industries on earth, fast fashion is the one of the most polluting, second only to oil. It creates cheap clothing at high quantities, but at the price of the health of workers in foreign countries, of the freshwater polluted with arsenic and chromium in their rivers, and of the forests that coat the planet's continents.

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## Cotton

Its water use is more than a cross to bear.



Photo courtesy of David Skarson

Cotton is one of the most common crops used in textiles and, unfortunately, it is quite needy. Its needs include, but aren't limited to...

- ...using 25% of all insecticides used around the world, despite only 2.4% of all crops being cotton.
- ...drinking a disproportionately large amount of water.
- ...using around 10% of all agricultural chemicals.

The process of dying it involved a worrying array of toxins, including but not limited to...

- acetic acid
- ammonium sulphate
- caustic soda

These toxins, sooner or later, find a way into rivers, lakes, and oceans.

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## Rayon/ Viscose

Over 150 million trees are cut down yearly to make way for plantations of eucalyptus; the wood pulp from these trees is processed to create rayon. Problems arise from not just the excessive amount of water eucalyptus consumes, but the processing required to create rayon.

In order to create rayon, the wood pulp undergoes processing, which is extremely chemically intensive. These toxic chemicals used in processing the pulp often end up, as with cotton, in the water.

Deforestation makes way for future bolts of viscose



Viscose fabric, photo courtesy of Viscomer

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## Synthetics

We reap what we sow - including plastic-fed fish.

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Synthetic fabrics are, at their core, made of plastic. This in and of itself results in plenty of pollution during creation. While dying is a less intensive process with synthetic fabrics, they do have other problems.

Every time a garment made of synthetic fabric such as polyester is washed, it releases up to 2,000 microplastics into the water. There are only so many places the water can go - and frequently, it goes into the ocean.



In a textile processing facility, 8% of all water is used in printing, while 10% is used in dyeing.



The dyeing and processing of textiles is responsible for approximately 18.5% of all freshwater pollution.

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## Dyeing

Cobalt-colored clothing yields chromium-flavored water in developing nations

Most textile dyeing occurs in third-world countries. These countries often lack the water-treatment facilities or the money to invest in treating water after it is used for dyeing purposes. The untreated water waste is often dumped into nearby waterways, which nearby communities rely on for agricultural, drinking, and cleaning purposes.

Dyes require different chemicals, such as chromium, which end up in the contaminated water that is dumped into the local waterways. These chemicals oftentimes cause severe illnesses, birth defects, and even death in those who drink the water or use it in their daily lives.

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## So What Can We Do?

Ways to reduce our negative impact on the fashion industry



Cartoon courtesy of iStock

- Limit the frequency of buying new clothes
- Buy used clothing from thrift stores and consignment shops
- Buy organic materials to limit pesticide use
- Repair and reuse damaged clothing
- Support innovative efforts of recycling materials and making them into textiles
- Consult sources that provide instructions on purchasing ethically-produced clothing



Repairing clothing, photo courtesy of iStock Photo Bank/istock

This way, we can make a sustainable world for everyone!

Infographic by Tali Ilkovich and Katherine Nation, 2018

