**SEPTEMBER 23, 2019**

How Much Do Our Wardrobes Cost to the Environment?

*The garment industry is one of the most polluting in the world, but some clothing makers and consumers are calling for a more sustainable industry*

**Fill in the blank with the appropriate noun:**

*industry, cost, production, chain, greenhouse gas, emission, receipts,*

*statistics, closet, microfibers, danger, consumption, delivery, wastewater.*

How much did you pay for the clothes in your\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? If you have the\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, you can calculate this. However, there is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_behind each dress, pair of jeans, shirt, and sock that goes unnoticed by most people: the cost to the environment.

According to figures from the [United Nations Environment Programme](http://web.unep.org/es) (UNEP), it takes 3,781 liters of water to make a pair of jeans, from the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of the cotton to the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_of the final product to the store. That equates to the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_of around 33.4 kilograms of carbon equivalent.

If that is for just one pair of jeans, imagine the environmental cost for everything in our wardrobes. The following\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, published by the UNEP and the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/), give us an idea:

* Every year the fashion industry uses 93 billion cubic meters of water — enough to meet the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_needs of five million people.
* Around 20 % of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_worldwide comes from fabric dyeing and treatment.
* Of the total fiber input used for clothing, 87 % is incinerated or disposed of in a landfill.
* The fashion \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_is responsible for 10 % of annual global carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. At this pace, the fashion industry’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_emissions will surge more than 50 % by 2030.
* If demographic and lifestyle patterns continue as they are now, global consumption of apparel will rise from 62 million metric tons in 2019 to 102 million tons in 10 years.
* Every year a half a million tons of plastic \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are dumped into the ocean, the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles. The\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? Microfibers cannot be extracted from the water and they can spread throughout the food\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Fast fashion**

The fashion industry’s operating model is exacerbating the problem by stepping up the pace of design and production. Collection launches are no longer seasonal; the replacement of clothing inventories has become much more frequent.

Many low-cost clothing stores offer new designs every week. In 2000, 50 billion new garments were made; nearly 20 years later, that figure has doubled, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The dizzying pace of apparel manufacturing has also accelerated consumption: the average person today buys 60 % more clothing than in 2000, the data show. And not only do they buy more, they also discard more as a result.

Less than 1 % of used clothing is recycled into new garments. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation estimates that every year some USD 500 billion in value is lost due to clothing that is barely worn, not donated, recycled, or ends up in a landfill.

**The industry should reinvent itself**

The fashion industry is key for economic development: it is valued at some USD 2.4 billion globally and directly employees 75 million people throughout its value chain. It is the world’s third-largest manufacturing sector after the automobile and technology industries.

This makes it a challenge for clothing makers to grow without being an enemy of the environment, to become allies of the climate while also promoting better conditions for workers in the sector.

In 2017, the Boston Consulting Group [took the pulse](https://globalfashionagenda.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Pulse-of-the-Fashion-Industry_2017.pdf) of the fashion industry. With a score of just 32 over 100, the management consulting firm found that the industry is slow to improve its sustainability. Some mid-sized and large companies have made strides, but half of the market has done little to become more sustainable in production. The study found that most fashion executives had not made environmental and social factors a part of the guiding principles of their corporate strategies.

Foundations like Ellen MacArthur and initiatives such as the recently formed [UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion](https://www.unenvironment.org/es/noticias-y-reportajes/comunicado-de-prensa/la-alianza-de-la-onu-para-la-moda-sostenible-abordara-el), in which the [World Bank’s Connect4Climate program](https://www.connect4climate.org/) and other organizations participate, are calling for a new textile economy. The goal is to explore the use of new materials to make clothing more durable so it can be resold or recycled into other products, helping to reduce pollution.

Some leading brands have answered this call and are working to identify fiber alternatives and develop more eco-friendly processes.

Technology and research are playing a key role in making the industry more sustainable. Athletic shoes and attire are getting made out of materials extracted from the plastic dumped into the ocean. Fish skins and natural dyes are replacing chemicals, fruit skins are substituting furs, and backpacks and purses are getting made out of discarded canvas. Some companies have a return policy so they can recycle the consumers’ garments after they have worn out.

In Latin America, the industry’s transition to a sustainable model is gaining momentum. Designers are exploring possibilities to use the region’s biodiversity in marketing sustainable brands. Events are being organized and alliances formed to promote the purchase of eco-friendly clothing and accessories. Initiatives such as [Hilo Sagrado](https://www.hilosagrado.org/) and [Evea](http://evea-ecofashion.com/en/), which received World Bank support through competitions organized by the Young Americas Business Trust, are working on this.

While a lot still needs to be done, it is encouraging that some companies are becoming involved when a decade ago there was little talk of sustainable fashion.

**Comprehension and discussion**

**Why is the fashion industry accused of not being sustainable?**

**How can the fashion industry become more sustainable?**

**What is fast fashion?**

**Do you know stores which have an ethical code of conduct to their production of clothes?**

**What can consumers do?**