

Eco-Tip of the week for 7-2-17

How to Avoid Fast Fashion's Dash to Landfill and Water Pollution

By David Goldstein, PWA, IWMD

“Disposable clothing” would be a repugnant term to people concerned about conservation, so designers at the edge of the fast fashion trend have a new term. They call it “one off” clothing, according to information presented by a recycling expert at a conference in Sacramento last week.

Tracey Harper, from the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (a.k.a. CalRecycle), described clothing designed to imitate couture fashion, but mass-produced with shoddy tailoring, using cheap, synthetic material. Some of this clothing is worn only once, and much of it is designed to last through only five wears. The old standard goal of clothing manufacturers was to produce garments durable enough to be worn at least 50 times without a notable compromise in quality, according to Harper.

Lou Buty, President of American Textile & Supply in Richmond, California, echoed Harper's assessment and added his own lament, noting the synthetic materials used in modern fast fashion cannot even be recycled into wiping rags, the specialty of his company. He urged concerned buyers to purchase natural fibers, so thrift stores unable to re-sell some items for reuse have another outlet for their discards.

However, some environmentally concerned companies produce durable products made from synthetic fibers. These garments can pose a different problem, potentially releasing micro-fibers into the environment during washing. Locally, Patagonia, the first registered public benefit corporation in California, is famous for its synchilla fabric, made from recycled plastic bottles, and their website offers advice to address this problem.

In addition to purchasing long-lasting garments of durable construction, customers are urged in to limit washing. One alternative to washing is spot cleaning with a rag and light soap, followed by a wet rag to wash out the soap, and then hanging to dry.

If machine washing is needed, Patagonia's website recommends front-loading washers, citing studies claiming “top-load washing machines shed more than five times as many microfibers as the same jacket in front-load washers.”

In a web posting updated last week, Patagonia announced their stores and web site will soon begin selling, at cost, the Guppy Friend, a hand-and-machine washing bag to capture microfibers in wash. The Patagonia web site also promotes another company's permanent washing machine filter products.

Responding to similar concerns about the way washing can result in pollution and reduce the durability of clothing, Levi Strauss & Company, makers of Levi's Jeans, has long

advised customers not to wash their jeans at all. In advice first posted three years ago in the company's on-line newspaper, *Unzipped*, Levi Chief Executive Officer, Chip Bergh, said directly, "You can stop washing your jeans."

Bergh, who called his company's jeans "the ultimate in slow fashion," bragged his product lasts longer "than most peoples' waist lines" and claimed Levis are "the number one brand of hand-me-downs and remain highly sought after in the vintage world."

The company also has products lines with shorter life spans, but within those product lines are sub-categories of garments advertising longer lasting construction, such as Dockers' Wellthread line of pants.

To remove the odor of biological residue such as sweat, *Unzipped* recommends freezing. Put your pants in a plastic bag and stick them in the freezer overnight.

You can reduce waste and prevent pollution by buying and maintaining quality garments.

<http://www.americanex.com/contact-us.html>

<http://www.patagonia.com/blog/2017/02/an-update-on-microfiber-pollution/>

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SHORT VERSION

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“Disposable clothing” would be a repugnant term to people concerned about conservation, so designers at the edge of the fast fashion trend have a new term. They call it “one off” clothing, according to Tracey Harper, from the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery. At a conference last week, she said many articles of trendy clothing are mass-produced with shoddy tailoring, using cheap, synthetic material, designed to last through only five wears.

In contrast, some environmentally concerned companies produce durable products made from synthetic fibers. These garments can pose a different problem, potentially releasing micro-fibers into the environment during washing. Locally, Patagonia, the first registered public benefit corporation in California, is famous for its synchilla fabric, made from recycled plastic bottles, and their website offers advice to address this problem.

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Similarly, in advice first posted three years ago in *Unzipped*, the on-line newspaper of Levi Strauss & Company, Chief Executive Officer, Chip Bergh, said directly, “You can stop washing your jeans.” To remove the odor of biological residue such as sweat, *Unzipped* recommends freezing. Put your pants in a plastic bag and stick them in the freezer overnight. Avoiding washes helps preserve the life of long-lasting garments. Bergh bragged his product lasts longer “than most peoples' waist lines.”

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