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Fast Fashion: A Worrying Trend

Fast fashion, a trend that has become quite common nowadays, is characterized by a frequent renewal of new clothes and new styles at low prices. The production process for these garments is often speeded up to meet market needs and to match new trends introduced every season, or even every week. The continuous and perpetual supply of new styles not only helps maintain consumer interest, but also allows retailers to maximize their profits. While fast fashion helps meet consumer needs effectively, it has many repercussions. Indeed, this popular trend has many negative consequences on the environment.

According to a study by the *Ellen MacArthur Foundation*, the fashion industry is the second most polluting industry on the planet, after oil. Indeed, the production of clothing is responsible for the emission of 1.2 billion tonnes of CO₂ per year, emitting as many greenhouse gases as the airline and marine transport industry. In addition, the production of cotton, one of the most widely used materials for making clothing, requires an immense amount of water. For example, a single kilogram of cotton fibre involves consuming 6,000 to 27,000 litres of water just for irrigating crops, which is approximately 2,500 litres of water for a single t-shirt. The use of cotton also contributes to water pollution, which

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affects the people and ecosystems surrounding factories. Indeed, about 20% of industrial water pollution is linked to textiles. It is mainly caused by pesticides, dye releases during manufacturing, as well as the synthetic fibres that degrade our clothes with every wash and reject thousands of plastic microfibers. A study by the University of Plymouth found that each washing machine cycle can release more than 700,000 plastic microfibers into the environment.

With fast fashion, the consumption of clothes has increased tremendously thanks to the low prices and the variety offered. We buy about 60% more items and keep them about half the time compared to 15 years ago. Consumers throw away, on average, 70 pounds of shoes and their clothing per person annually. According to the *Waste and Resources Action Program*, a British charity that aims to reduce waste, about 30% of the clothes in a typical wardrobe have not been worn in more than a year. This totals 1.7 trillion items that have not been worn. We North Americans are the biggest consumers of new clothes, at 37 kilograms each year. The world average is 13 kilograms per person. In Canada, every household throws away 46 kilograms of clothing per year and 8 to 12 percent of municipal waste landfills are occupied by textiles. The poor quality of fast fashion is one reason for this huge consumption. If you buy a good quality item that will last longer, it is cheaper in the long run than buying several items that fall apart or lose their quality within a few months.

We are all probably guilty of buying clothes from the fast fashion industry. That's why it's important that we are aware of the choices we make as consumers and shop responsibly. There are several alternatives and new habits that we can adopt in order to minimize the impact of our clothing purchases on the environment and to avoid fast fashion, while remaining financially reasonable. For example, we can shop at thrift stores, buy quality clothes, shop local, etc. We can also choose clothing from fair trade and eco-responsible brands like Reformation, Patagonia, Columbia, Amour Vert, Kamik, and Pact.



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