

Protecting Clean Water Together Series: Do you wear clothes? Then you can reduce water pollution!

Written by: Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association



Caption: “Beautiful” it is not. Fast fashion fouls water and the earth at every stage, from growing the fiber to dumping it in a landfill.

If you sometimes lose heart about making a difference in the world, you should know that one small but real step starts with your closet.

It doesn't take a lot of thought to understand that fast-fashion clothes — trendy duds produced fast and cheap, designed to be used a few times and then chucked — are a planetary nightmare.

Just growing the cotton for one tee shirt and a pair of jeans can consume more than 2,000 gallons of water. That's enough drinking water for a family of four for over a year.

Worse, according to *Forbes*, fashion and textiles as an industry “is a major polluter of water...from the agricultural runoff from cottonfields causing algal blooms that choke rivers, to the dyeing process releasing a cocktail of toxic chemicals and the washing of clothes releasing microplastics.”

And landfills are full of thrown-away clothes! More than 34 billion pounds of used textiles annually in America alone. That’s 100 pounds on average that we each throw away. So there’s a lot each one of us can do.

One way to start is thrifting. It’s not just Gen Z that loves thrift shops, yard sales, and flea markets for their good prices on gently used clothes. You can thrift shop in person or virtually. Online, consider ThredUp, Facebook Marketplace, eBay, and local “buy nothing” groups. Check out your favorite brands online — Levi’s, REI, Patagonia, Eileen Fisher and dozens of others have webpages dedicated to re-selling their goods. Some will take back, even buy back, their brand from you.

Then, instead of trashing useable clothes — your own or the kids’ — think about donating them to local churches or other groups that distribute clothing for free. In the Brodhead Watershed, we also have re-sale shops that accept wearables in decent condition. Some, like Goodwill, the Salvation Army, Safe Monroe (formerly Women’s Resources), and the Nearly New Shop, use the proceeds for good causes.

Clothes are essential. Wasting and fouling enormous amounts of water is not. Who knows? You might find it’s kind of fun to have some clothes in your closet that make you look good — make you feel good about yourself too.

For more information:

<https://www.fairplanet.org/story/how-the-fashion-industry-pollutes-our-water/>

<https://www.sustainably-chic.com/blog/how-the-fashion-industry-pollutes-water>

Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member! www.brodheadwatershed.org