

## **Our wasteful clothing habits should go out of style.**

Today, we spend less of our income on clothes, yet we are able to buy much more than before. Immediate gratification is made possible with more disposable income and credit availability. Fast fashion encourages a rapid turnover and high disposability. This is why the global fashion industry is worth US\$3 trillion – or 2 per cent of the world's gross domestic product in 2015 – but at what cost? Many may already know about the carbon emissions, water consumption and waste that are created during our clothes' entire life cycle – from material, production, transport, use and reuse to disposal. In fact, the fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world, just behind oil. Some may also be aware of the related issues of worker exploitation and health and safety problems.

Most of us don't think carefully before we buy. The result is: in 2014, Hong Kong people sent 107,000 tonnes of textiles to the landfill. A study comparing the consumer behaviour of young adults in Hong Kong and Canada found that interviewees may espouse environmentalism and social responsibility, yet the same moral obligations do not extend towards fashion.

So what can be done? The answer is simple: buy less.

Fast fashion companies can embrace sustainability by sourcing more sustainably, reducing water consumption and reusing water, using less harmful chemicals, monitoring suppliers, and reinvesting into the communities where clothes are produced. But, ultimately, consumers must take responsibility. Buying less is better for our peace of mind. Research has found that impulsive buyers often suffer from buyer's remorse after the purchase.

The clothes we hoard also take up space at home, and space is at a premium here. Although we can empty our closets by donating clothes, NGOs and recycling companies simply cannot handle the rate and volume at which we donate.

When you really do need new pieces, why not buy second-hand or "pre-loved" items? Better yet, swap with your friends. Friends of the Earth (HK) runs redistribution programmes for those in need and a swapping programme for public housing estate residents.

Finally, consider building your own capsule wardrobe. The concept was first popularised by American designer Donna Karan. This is a streamlined collection of one or two dozen essential and interchangeable items of clothing that you love and do not go out of fashion. Look at Project 333 or Susie Faux's blog for some tips on how to go about building a stylish and practical wardrobe.

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