Christ Episcopal Church
Green Team
Tip of the Month

Luke 12:33 (NRSV) Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out. . .”

Promoting Creation Care & Reducing our Carbon Footprint

The Green Team Tip of the Month is written by Elizabeth Haynes. If you have a tip to share, you can forward it to her at ehaynes@mnsi.net.

Thinking about clothes.

Fast Fashion is the term that describes high-style, mass produced, inexpensive clothing that replicates designer trends. It has benefits and costs—especially environmental costs.

McKinsey (https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-fast-fashion) reports that in 2023 the global Fast Fashion industry was estimated at $1.7 Trillion—yup that’s a staggering number. And the industry employed “more than 300 million people throughout the value chain.” In other words, the people who sew the clothes, the people who ship the clothes, the people who design the clothes, the people who market the clothes, etc. This means that Fast Fashion supports our economies and generates a lot of jobs. That’s a real positive—so what are the drawbacks?

The EPA (https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/textiles-material-specific-data) reports that in 1960 the US generated 1,76 million tons of textiles and landfilled approximately 1.71 million tons. By 2018 textile generation had ballooned to 17 million tons or 81 pounds of clothing per person per year. McKinsey notes that consumers treat Fast Fashion garments as nearly disposable. Many are discarded after only seven wears. They also report that three out of five garments end up in a landfill or are incinerated.

On-line returns are big contributors to the mounds of clothes in landfills. BBC Earth (https://www.bbcearth.com/news/your-brand-new-returns-end-up-in-landfill) reports that each year US customers return 3.5 billion products and only about 20% of them are defective. So only 20% get discarded right? **Wrong** most of it goes to landfills.

The EPA reports that textiles generate 17 million tons of solid waste each year. That amounts to about 81 pounds of clothing per person per year. Much of these textiles are new unused clothing—often from online purchases that were returned.

Online retailers have encouraged us to buy multiples of products—a size up, a size down and the size you think you need—with the intent to return what doesn’t fit. It’s a business model that is filling our landfills and creating millions of tonnes of greenhouse gas.

Armed with these facts, maybe it’s time to look for alternate sources of clothing from producers that pay living wages, produce quality products that can stand the test of time from organic natural fibers.

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1960-2018 Data on Textiles in MSW by Weight (in thousands of U.S. tons)

Management Pathway	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017	2018
Generation	1,760	2,040	2,530	5,810	9,480	11,510	13,220	16,060	16,890	17,030
Recycled	50	60	160	660	1,320	1,830	2,050	2,460	2,570	2,510
Composted	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Combustion with Energy Recovery	-	10	50	880	1,880	2,110	2,270	3,060	3,170	3,220
Landfilled	1,710	1,970	2,320	4,270	6,280	7,570	8,900	10,540	11,150	11,300

Sources: American Apparel and Footwear Association, International Trade Commission, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Office of Textiles and Apparel, and the Council for Textile Recycling.

A dash in the table means that data is not available.