

When you hear “second largest polluter in the world,” you may think of the meat industry or the fishing industry. That would make sense, considering their yearly water pollution and CO2 emissions. This industry is quieter, and masks its environmental harm with glitz and glamour. This is the fast fashion industry: mass production of disposable and cheap clothing, along with rotating new “styles” in the blink of an eye to lure in consumers. Envision this in the eye of a young woman—all of her friends buy new clothes every season, and she does not want to be left behind. She buys more clothes than she needs at the mall, unaware of the dire impacts. It is this allure that makes people, especially young people, so susceptible to support this industry. But, sewing some clothes can’t make any *real* impact... right? One of the biggest receivers of this impact is the ocean. Harmful dyes infect wastewater that is dumped into rivers, where marine life face the consequences. The marine abuse does not stop there. Whenever we wash synthetic, plastic based material (polyester, nylon, etc.), about **1,900** microfibers are released into runoff. When these are eaten by fish that are then eaten by bigger fish, this introduces plastic into our food chain. The fast fashion industry also takes responsibility for 10% of global carbon emissions, with the sheer effort it takes to manufacture, produce, and transport cheap material. Synthetic material is made from fossil fuels, which uses much more energy than natural fabrics like cotton or linen. Above all, arguably one of the most pressing issues is the gargantuan amount of waste produced from fast fashion. Due to the cheap quality of the clothes, an average family (justifiably) disposes 70 pounds of clothing **per year**. Out of 70 pounds, only 15% is recycled/donated, and the remaining arrives at a landfill. Once there, the synthetic fibers rot for more than **200 years**.

What can we, as global citizens, do to boycott such a harmful industry? An obvious first step is to boycott fast fashion mall brands. This includes, but is not limited to Forever 21, Zara, H&M, and Gap. Another is to simply buy less. Ask yourself if the garment is from an ethical source, and then question if you really need it. My personal favorite is to **normalize buying secondhand clothing**. Not only does this reduce contributing to pollution, it reduces contribution to waste in landfills. For a long time, there was a stigma against buying secondhand, but that is slowly decreasing in newer generations. Teenagers especially use resale apps such as Depop or ThredUP to find trendy and great quality clothing. Although the fast fashion industry targets young women specifically, all ages should feel obliged to stand against the environmental abuse of the industry. Not only will you know that you are helping the environment, you will feel proud about sustaining for future generations to come.