Clothing and Climate Change: The Cost of Fashion

Becoming a fashion "maven" in the era of global warming is simple, just have fewer clothes collecting dust in your closet and wear clothes made of eco-friendly fabrics!

It is environmentally expensive to acquire the raw materials to make fabrics and to manufacture, transport, package, and sell garments. As much as 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions are associated with the fashion industry (more than the global cost of aviation). The industry is also responsible for generating 20% of all wastewater. These estimates do not include the cost of washing and caring for our clothes, or what happens when we dispose of old clothes.

Many innovative companies are decreasing their carbon footprint by utilizing eco-friendly fabrics, including ones produced from hemp, bamboo, and banana plants, and ones made from recycled plastic, wood pulp, and wool. Undyed and unbleached materials (such as some denims) also reduce the carbon footprint of clothes.

When we manage our clothing purchases and wardrobes wisely, we make a positive contribution to slowing global warming.

Dress For the Planet

- **Buy fewer new clothes.** (The "fast fashion" trend of recent years refers to the rapid release of new styles and cheap, mass-produced clothing lines. The result is that people are buying more clothes, wearing and repairing them less, and discarding them sooner.).

  o When you can afford to do so, buy fewer, higher-quality clothes that will last longer.
  o Purchase only what you need and avoid impulse shopping.

- **Wear clothes longer.** (Wearing clothes just a few months longer before replacing them reduces their environmental impact.)

- **Choose clothes made of eco-friendly fabrics.** (Fossil fuel-based fibers like polyesters and spandex account for 62% of all fabric production, and contribute twice as much to global warming than plant fibers like cotton.)

- **Buy, recycle, and repair used clothing.**

  o Donating used clothing to second-hand stores and purchasing used clothes extend their lives and reduces their carbon footprint.
  o Recycle clothes that are no longer good enough to wear. Incinerating or sending clothes to landfills simply adds to greenhouse gas emissions. Some eco-conscious companies have instore collection centers, and will recycle polyester fibers, which generates 70% less emissions than virgin polyester.

- **Wash clothes in cold water.**

  o Heating water for washing, except for hygiene purposes, results in higher greenhouse gas emissions and is unnecessary—modern detergents are just as effective at cold temperatures.
  o Washing in cold water extends the life of clothes and reduces the amount of microplastics released into the environment.

- **Air dry clothes on a line.** (Using a clothes dryer adds significantly to one's carbon footprint.)