

## 10 Minutes for the Planet

### Toxic Fashion ©

by Valentine Rinner



Hello everyone and welcome to this week's episode of 10 Minutes for the Planet. A few days ago, I tried to go shopping. And failed.

Every year or so I try revamping the wardrobe from my teenage years. But every year it gets harder and harder. Being aware of the social environmental impact of a 3-euro "Made in Bangladesh" t-shirt catches up with me sooner or later. Sometimes, a flash of consumerism hits me, and hushes my conscience, but even so, the cheap, ultra-thin, synthetic garments I find on the shelves, immediately cut my craving. They will get smelly quite quickly and distort, if not rip, after only a handful of laundries. Buying these garments will only lead me to extra chores and having to buy more to replace them.

When I come across an old Lacoste polo, Petit Bateau knickers, Levi jeans or Uniqlo sweater in a vintage shop or the family attic, I'm impressed by how sturdy they are, despite the decades. If I stored a t-shirt today, my children would most likely find a rag!

Today, in order to increase revenues and because of the highly competitive industry, brands cut costs by using thinner fabrics. You can buy cheaper pieces but this creates more waste, especially as most garments are non-recyclable, as synthetic mixes cannot be salvaged. Another problem is that mainstream clothes today are not only of cheaper quality but are also toxic. Mostly because of cancerogenic chemical dyes or unwanted chemical residues from the manufacturing process, which penetrate through our skin and pollute our waters. According to Greenpeace, this concerns two-thirds of the clothing industry today.

Apart from a few linen exceptions, finding 100% natural textiles is now close to impossible in mainstream stores. But at least in Europe the composition must be on the label. You know, the tiny one stitched on the inside.

No need to mention the production country either, and even if it does, it doesn't take into account that the garment could have travelled through many different countries before being assembled. And of course, nothing is mentioned about the working conditions of the staff. In 2013, in Bangladesh, the collapse of a large building with clothing industry workers inside, left over a thousand dead, and over two thousand wounded, most with heavy lifelong disabilities. The event was a worldwide media scandal, as the collapse of the building was caused by poor health, safety regulations, and maintenance. It shed light on the substandard working conditions of clothing industry workers, who face poor infrastructure, insufficient pay, repression, etc. Another

similar fire in early June, injuring many, shows that the problem remains. In an alarming number of countries in South East Asia, but also in Eastern Europe, International Labour Organisation minimum rights are often disregarded.

So what are the options? If we buy from them, international brands will continue to exploit workers, pollute the earth, and compromise our health, while increasing revenue for a handful of investors. Every euro that we withhold from them will take a stand against global fashion victimisation. I know how hard it is! It's so easy to consume cheap disposable clothing, but fashion shouldn't cost us the earth or other people's lives.

A few initiatives such as the Clean Clothes Campaign or the Greenpeace Detox Campaign, are trying to raise awareness and negotiate commitments for international brands to clean up their supply chain. Following their recommendations can be a way to accelerate the dismantlement of the global chain of toxic pollution and social exploitation.

A number of new brands are also setting up based on better social and environmental practices, selecting environmentally friendly materials that are transformed close to their source, choosing non-toxic chemicals and dyes, and durable designs. Look for them instead!

See you next for a new episode of 10 Minutes for the Planet.