

The Life Cycle Of A T-shirt

Annually, we sell and buy two billion t-shirts globally, but how and where is the average t-shirt made, and what is its environmental impact?

Before you read the complete article, look at this vocabulary and find it in the text

item: an individual object or unit

to sow (sowed, sown): to plant the seeds of plants or **crops** (see below)

bales: when cotton or hay is collected, it is put together in a bale

crop: a cultivated plant that is grown commercially

to ship: to transport goods and products

to dip: to put something into a liquid for a short time

harmful: something that causes damage or injury

to boost: to amplify, increase or improve

Consider the classic white t-shirt. Clothing **items** can vary a lot, but a typical t-shirt begins its life on a farm in America, China, or India, where cotton seeds are **sown**, irrigated and grown and then harvested by self-driving machines. Finally the cotton is pressed into 225-kilogram **bales**.

The cotton plants require a huge quantity of water and pesticides. Two thousand seven hundred litres of water are needed to produce the average t-shirt, enough to fill more than 30 bathtubs.

Meanwhile, cotton uses more insecticides and pesticides than any other **crop** in the world. These pollutants can be carcinogenic, harm the health of field workers and damage surrounding ecosystems. Some t-shirts are made of organic cotton grown without pesticides and insecticides, but organic cotton makes up less than 1% of cotton produced worldwide.

The cotton bales are then **shipped** to a spinning facility, usually in China or India, where high-tech machines eventually turn the cotton into sheets of rough greyish fabric that are treated with heat and chemicals until they become soft and white. This fabric is **dipped** into commercial bleaches and dyes, which unfortunately contain cancer-causing cadmium, lead, chromium,

and mercury. Other **harmful** compounds and chemicals can cause pollution when released as toxic waste water in rivers and oceans.

Technologies are now so advanced in some countries that the entire process of growing and producing fabric barely touches a human hand. But after, the finished cloth travels to factories, often in Bangladesh, China, India, or Turkey, where human labour is still required to stitch them up into t-shirts. Bangladesh, for example, employs 4.5 million people in the t-shirt industry, but they typically face poor conditions and low wages.

After manufacture, all those t-shirts travel by ship, train, and truck to be sold in high-income countries, a process that gives cotton an enormous carbon footprint. Apparel production accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions. From 1994 to 2014, cheaper prices **boosted** production by 400% to around 80 billion garments each year.

Finally, in a consumer's home, the t-shirt goes through one of the most resource-intensive phases of its lifetime. In America, for instance, the average household does nearly 400 loads of laundry per year each using about 150,000 litres of water (*per year in older, less-efficient machines*). Washing machines and dryers both use energy, with dryers requiring five to six times more than washers. All in all, fashion has become the second largest polluter in the world after oil.

But there are things we can do: consider shopping second-hand, try to look for textiles made from recycled or organic fabrics, wash clothes less and line dry to save resources, and at the end of their life, donate, recycle, or reuse clothes. Finally, you might ask yourself, how many t-shirts and articles of clothing do you and your family really need?

adapted from: **TED-Ed - Lessons Worth Sharing**

"Let's chat about that!"

Write your answers in an email and send them to your ECP coach!

- How many t-shirts do you have? And trousers, shoes etc.?
- Think about all your clothes. How many of them have you NOT used in the last 12 months? What could you get rid of?
- Do you know where all your clothes were made?
- Do you have a clothes dryer? If not, would you like one?

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Describe these t-shirts to your class mates





10 common idioms based on clothing

- **at the drop of a hat**
- without needing any advance notice
- *My Grandma will babysit for anyone at the drop of a hat.*

- **below the belt**
- not fair or socially acceptable
- *His comment about Manfred's disability was below the belt.*

- **caught with one's pants down**
- unprepared
- *I was caught with my pants down on Monday. I forgot about my partner's birthday.*

- **(have a) card up one's sleeve**
- have a secret or reserve plan
- *I think Josh has a card up his sleeve, he seems really confident.*

- **fit like a glove**
- fit perfectly (tight to one's body)
- *Anita's new dress fits like a glove.*

- **hand-me-down**
- used clothing
- *We buy hand-me-down skates because the kids' feet grow so quickly.*

- **in one's birthday suit**
- in the nude
- *The swimmers in the lake were in their birthday suits.*

- **off-the-cuff comment**
- say something without thinking
- *I didn't have a speech prepared. Everything I said was off the cuff.*

- **pull one's socks up**
- try harder
- *You'll have to pull your socks up if you want to pass your exams.*
- **put a sock in it**
- stop talking
- Put a sock in it! I'm trying to tell a story.



Write a story - either invented or based on real events - that starts with the following sentence:

'I opened my wardrobe and chose my favourite t-shirt.'

And ends with this sentence:

'And that was the last time I ever wore that t-shirt.'

- Write no more than 180 words (There is no minimum)
- The deadline is Sunday 22nd October
- You can enter more than once

The best story will win a voucher to use at PETIT BOHÈME where you can design your own, exclusive t-shirt!



Petit Bohème, Correría Kalea, 50