

**Pembroke Diocesan Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada  
Fall Meeting, Our Lady of Sorrows, Petawawa, October 28, 2023, Oral Report  
Louise Rockburn, Education and Health Chair**

Madam President,

This year, at its 103rd National Annual Meeting of Members, the National Council of the CWL, passed a resolution to urge the federal government to expand subsidies aimed at reducing textile waste in Canada. Textile waste is one of the fastest growing waste streams in the world. Experts stress the importance of recycling and repurposing clothing even if it is damaged. Some, in the recycling industry say that Canada lacks in infrastructure to properly repurpose clothes. Fashion consumption is at an unparalleled high. Every year, Canadians trash about one billion pounds of fabric and home items such as curtains and carpets. Thrift stores and Goodwill Services offer noble ventures, but only a small fraction of donated clothes end up on people's backs. Most of used garments end up in landfills. In January of this year, the University of Waterloo and Seneca College developed a new method to evaluate textile quality using a grade system from A to F. In testing this method, they found that more than ½ of textile waste in Canada could be reduced and almost ¼ could be recycled.

So, let's look at the fabrics. There are two types of fibers used to make fabric:

- 1) natural fibres: these are used to produce fabric out of animal or plant-based fibers. These are cotton, silk, wool, cashmere bamboo hemp and jute
- 2) synthetic fibers these are acquired from petroleum products and require a complex processing procedure, consuming enormous amounts of energy and water. Many of these are also turned into plastic fibers and depend on fossil fuel extraction. Examples of synthetic fabrics are polyester, acrylic, spandex, nylon and rayon (semi-synthetic: wood & synthetic).

60 % of the clothes today is made of plastic. Textile waste also affects water systems as synthetic textiles produce 35% of all microplastics in the ocean. How is that you say? Well, every time we wash synthetic fabric such as polyester, spandex, acrylic and/or nylon microplastics are released into the sewage system which make their way to rivers, lakes and eventually to the oceans. Attached is a chart of the different synthetic fibres and their effect on the environment. So, what are we to do? Stop buying close and go around naked or wear dirty clothes? I don't think so!!!

These are small steps we can start doing if we are not already doing:

1. Start examining the tags on clothes when shopping and favor clothes with a high % of natural fibers
2. Wear the clothes more than once before putting them in the laundry
3. Wash the clothes in cold water. It is less damaging to the fibres
4. Buy second hand
5. Use microfilter like Cora Ball
6. Mending fabric
7. Repurpose ex: rags,
8. Raise awareness on this issue by holding workshops, offering informative videos and providing resources to members and the community at large
9. Encourage members to participate in the annual Federal Waste Reduction Month in Canada (October).
10. Write letters to the prime minister and minister of environment and climate change urging the federal government to expand established subsidies aimed at reducing textile waste in Canada and send copies to your local member of parliament.

Respectfully submitted,

## TEXTILE WASTE IN CANADA PROPERTIES OF TEXTILES

### **NOT ECO-FRIENDLY FABRICS**

Fabric	Examples of products	Made from	Bio-degradable	Releases Microplastics With every wash	Ecofriendly Rating
POLYESTER	Clothes, bed sheets, upholstered furniture	Petroleum and terephthalic acid	No	Yes, In landfills, estimates over 200 yrs to decompose	POOR
ACRYLIC	Carpets, scarves socks, gloves, sweaters, fabric	Fossil Fuel Extraction	No	Yes, one of the most polluting with laundry	VERY POOR
SPANDEX	Athletic clothes, bathing suits, hosiery, leggings	Polyurethane and Polyethylene	No	yes	POOR
NYLON	Shirts, lingerie, raincoats, cycle-wear, underwear	Crude oil & tons of petroleum	No 30 - 40yrs to break up	Yes	POOR

### **SOMEWHAT ECO-FRIENDLY FABRICS**

BAMBOO	Bedding, towels, Underwear, blankets, diapers	Fast growing grass farmed in India	Yes	no	Okay
COTTON	Clothes	Cotton plants	yes	no	Okay
MODAL	Sportswear, T-shirts, underwear	Cellulose from tree fibres	Yes, many years to breakdown	no	Okay
RAYON	Bedsheets, curtains, blankets	Semi-synthetic: cellulose pulp + bamboo + sugar cane	Yes, but 20 to 200 years to breakdown	no	Okay

### **ECO-FRIENDLY FABRICS**

CANVAS	Outdoor gear	Cotton, Hemp	yes	no	Good
SILK	Carpet, drapes	Silkworm, cocoons	yes	no	Good
ORGANIC COTTON	Sanitary products, diapers, sheets....	Cotton grown organic, India, China	yes	no	Good
RECYCLED COTTON	Household textile and garments	Recycled cotton fabric	yes	no	Very Good
HEMP	Dresses, pants....	Stalks of hemp	yes	no	Very Good
LINEN	Clothing, towels, napkins, bedding...	Flax plants	yes	no	Very Good
TENCEL	Clothing, bedding	Wood pulp	yes	no	Very Good
WOOL	Clothing, insulation	Sheep wool	yes	no	Very Good

These are small steps we can start doing if we are not already doing:

1. Start examining the tags on clothes when shopping and favor clothes with a high % of natural fibers
2. Wear the clothes more than once before putting them in the laundry
3. Wash the clothes in cold water. It is less damaging to the fibres
4. Buy second hand
5. Use microfilter like Cora Ball (microplastics, hair, pet hair) lasts five years
6. Mend fabric
7. Repurpose ex: rags,
8. Raise awareness on this issue by holding workshops, offering informative videos and providing resources to members and the community at large
9. Encourage members to participate in the annual Federal Waste Reduction Month in Canada (October).
10. Write letters to the prime minister and minister of environment and climate change urging the federal government to expand established subsidies aimed at reducing textile waste in Canada and send copies to your local member of parliament.