

Purchasing

Climate change impact and actions

Overview of topic

Every product created has an environmental footprint, from the resources used to make it, to its distribution and use, and eventually its disposal.¹ With global population doubling over the last half century and the global economy growing nearly fourfold,² humanity now uses the equivalent of 1.6 Earths to provide the resources we use and to absorb our waste.³ This means it now takes the Earth one year and eight months to regenerate what we use in a year.⁴ We must learn to do more with less through regenerative practices and establishing circular strategies that result in re-use of materials rather than disposal.

Estimates are that 55% of global greenhouse gas emissions can be addressed through increasing energy efficiency and shifting to renewable energy sources.

The remaining 45%, however, comes from producing the cars, clothes, food, and other products we use every day.⁵ How we individually and collectively factor climate change into our purchasing decisions is therefore a key element for addressing climate change.

Reuse, recycling, repair, refurbishment, regenerative practices and minimizing waste must all come to the forefront in our purchasing decisions. Our choices, which also include refusing items, buying less, and sharing more, can help reduce the demand for steel, aluminum, cement, fabric, water and plastics, and the emissions associated with their production and use. Responsible purchasing means paying attention to what is done with an item at the end of its useful life, as well as thinking about the item at the time of purchase.

Did you know?

Globally, only

14%

of plastic packaging is recycled.⁶

Every second around the world, the equivalent of

one garbage truck full of textiles is landfilled or burned.⁷

- Each year, 11 million tons of plastic enters the ocean, the equivalent of one garbage truck load every minute.⁸
- By 2050, virtually every seabird species on the planet will be eating plastic.⁹
- Recycling aluminum requires 95% less energy compared to extracting and using virgin aluminum.¹⁰
- Approximately 16% of the world's production forests are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified.¹¹
- A home power drill is used somewhere between six and 20 minutes, on average, in its entire lifetime.¹²
- In Europe, the average car sits unused 92% of the time.¹³

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Positive climate actions you can take



Today

Plan ahead and “bring your own” to replace common single-use plastics—including shopping bags, produce bags, and cutlery.

Invest in reusable items such as durable plastic or stainless steel water bottles, reusable straws, etc.

Refuse items ahead of reducing, reusing and recycling. Even “free” items have an environmental cost.

When ordering takeaway/takeout food, ask the restaurant to not include plastic utensils, straws, or unneeded condiments.



Next month

Instead of buying new, look for items at second-hand shops, local community sales or markets.

Build a capsule wardrobe made up of a small number of high-quality pieces that are favorites and which can be mixed to create many different looks.

Choose products that are made from recycled content. If that’s not an option, look for products with certification labels such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and the recycling logo.

Time for an electronic device upgrade? Research how to properly recycle your old device—recycling/takeback programs offered by your local government or device manufacturer etc.



Over the coming year

When purchasing items that are not in continuous use, investigate if the item can be borrowed or rented.

Explore sharing opportunities in your local area such as tool libraries, or consider starting one.

Learn about sustainable fashion to drive your purchasing decisions.

When your budget allows, look for durability, lasting design, reparability/replaceable parts. High quality items can be passed on to others when you no longer need them.

Advocate: Petition your local government for better recycling capabilities, curbside recycling, strict regulations on waste disposal, and initiatives to cut plastic waste.

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Additional Resources

Read

- [Ellen MacArthur Foundation | Circular Economy](#) (site)
- [Ellen MacArthur Foundation | How the circular economy tackles climate change](#) (site)
- [Ellen MacArthur Foundation | The circular economy in detail](#) (site)
- [WWF | Mapping corporate action on plastic waste](#) (report)
- [WWF | Reduce your waste guide](#) (report)
- [Asia Times | Lessons from 2020: time for a circular economy](#) (opinion piece)
- [Sandra Goldmark | Fixation](#) (book)

Watch

- [WWF | Solutions for a plastic-free future for nature](#) (webinar)
- [WWF | Responsible sourcing](#) (video)
- [WWF | Why the FSC label matters for forests, people, and wildlife](#) (video)
- [VOX + UCLA | The environmental cost of free two-day shipping](#) (video)
- [VOX + UCLA | Why your old phones collect in a junk drawer of sadness](#) (video)
- [VOX + UCLA | Takeout creates a lot of trash. It doesn't have to](#) (video)
- [International Resource Panel | How can resource efficiency contribute to the fight against climate change](#) (video)

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¹ WWF.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Footprintnetwork.org, "World footprint" accessed Jan 4, 2021.

⁵ Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change, (2019, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>).

⁶ World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company, The New Plastics Economy — Rethinking the future of plastics (2016, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>).

⁷ Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future, (2017, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>).

⁸ PEW, Breaking the Plastic Wave, (2020, https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2020/07/breakingtheplasticwave_report.pdf).

⁹ WWF.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ WWF.

¹² Ted Talks. "The shareable future of cities." Video featuring Alex Steffen, 6.07, 2011.

¹³ Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Growth Within: a circular economy vision of a competitive Europe, (2015, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>).

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