

The Hidden Cost Of Menstruation

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Menstruation is known as a basic and natural cycle that menstruators across the globe go through. Yet, who knew that the period products that are most accessible to us such as pads and tampons from brands like “Always” and “Tampax”, cause greater environmental problems than most people think.



(ABC-News)

But why do people not realise that period products add to plastic-pollution?

This is because menstruation is associated with shame in society due to gender stereotypes and society-views towards women. It’s known as Period Stigma and is why many individuals are shocked to hear the concept of period waste discussed publicly.

Is period disposal a problem in supposedly sustainable and clean nations like Canada?

Stated by the LNM, about 93% of the female population uses disposable period products. Here, in the GTA (Greater-Toronto-Area), there are about 2,249,948 menstruating females that use disposable period products (According to Toronto’s 2021 census). So if a woman uses **260 products per year, doing the math**, about 584 million products would end up in landfills.

As shocking as it seems, did you know that period products that end up in landfills stay there for about 500-800 years, rotting and emitting gases such as methane.

However, these things don't just wind up in landfills. There have been numerous instances of tampon-applicators washing-up on nearby beaches, lakes (like Lake Ontario; Ontario's biggest freshwater source) and harbours.



Environmental group, A-Greener-Future, found plastic tampon-applicators along the shores of Lake Ontario (CBC).

How Do These Products End Up In Waterways?

Tampons and Pads are not supposed to be getting into our water supply. After being used, they are meant to be thrown straight into the garbage where it is collected and brought to one of the City's stations. From there, it is taken to **recycling-facilities**.

But this is where the problem starts. Period products are a single-use product and generally can not be recycled due to the fact that they've been in contact with blood (considered human waste). So these products end up getting incinerated for energy, and dumped in rivers.

The same thing generally happens with these products when you flush them down the toilet (new study from [prsnwslink](#) states that 36% of teenagers and 26% of women admit to flushing tampons).

And the worst part is that it's TEENAGERS doing this to make people think they're not menstruating. This is a form of "period stigma" that causes a lot of teenagers to not open-up if they have problems with their menstruation.

“ I used to flush tampons down the toilet to hide that I was on my period. Now, I don’t really care but I didn’t consider the environmental impact this had”- commented Gurnoor Dhillion, a 14 year old female.

These products wind up to a sewage-treatment-facility, where all of the waste is cleansed before being dumped into rivers and lakes.

From an interview from CBC with Lake Ontario Waterkeeper and president of SwimDrinkFish, (group that monitors water in Lake Ontario), Mark Mattson said “The fact that they're ending up on beaches is an indicator that there's sewage being discharged in the area”.

Untreated sewage normally isn't released into waterways. But sometimes, it does happen.

In cities with older sewage-systems, the same pipes take both sewage and rainwater to the treatment plant. These combined pipes are used a lot in the GTA, but if there's a big rainstorm, the sewers overflow, and it’s all released into waterways without being treated.

It's important for people to realise that our current methods of trash disposal are neither safe nor sustainable, and that the provincial government isn't working towards Sustainable-Development-Goal 11; Sustainable Cities & Communities. We should tell the Ford government to update our sewage-systems and even better to find an eco-friendlier way to dispose of our waste!

What are period products made of that are making numerous environmental-advocates upset?

Single-use menstruation products, (from MadeSafe.Org), are entirely constructed of synthetic materials like rayon, which comes from trees. The rayon used is significantly processed, rendering the final piece far from "natural." Many products also use polyester, another type of plastic and conventional cotton, grown using toxic pesticides.

These materials once went through a bleaching process where harmful chemicals such as **Chlorine & Dioxins** (linked to cancer) were used (have been banned in parts-of-Canada). But is that enough?

Let's take a look at Canada’s biggest pad brand, Always.

Always pads have 4 layers, the first is made up of polyester (absorbent fabric). The bottom part of the pad is made up of literal plastic known as Polyethylene and Polypropylene, both of which are found in plastic bags.

“ I am certainly upset about the amount of plastic going into our products. Menstruation should be done safely and honestly, plastic is not the best-way” said Diya Patel, a student at Morning Star, in Mississauga.

This problem comes under SDG 12; Responsible Consumption and Production, as the production of these pads are not eco-friendly but are actually economically profitable for menstrual companies.

Solutions

When deciding what products to use for menstrual periods, most people will pick up what’s easily found in stores. These are usually single use tampons or sanitary pads. Although, we can’t exactly change the way most companies produce period-products, we can change the products we use.

Consider using goods that can be reused, such as reusable menstrual cups or menstruation pads that can last 3 months. Reusable period pad initiatives can be given by local organizations like Help A Girl Out. If switching is not an option, using a reusable tampon applicator like those sold by Thinx is also fantastic. Companies like Natracare even deliver plastic free supplies to your doorstep.

If you are able, consider wearing period underwears. Even though it’s quite expensive, ranging from \$24-\$64 (from WebMD), if properly cared for, they should last around 2 years.

Doing these small changes can greatly reduce our carbon footprint, and help our environment.

So, are you ready to take action?



(Image-By-Me)

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