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# Santa Barbara Wants System to Repurpose Fabrics, Avoiding Textile Waste



by Isabella Genovese, Noozhawk Contributing Writer

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Textile recycling workshop organizer Joanne Brasch sits on a repurposed couch dropped off by a MarBorg truck. Brasch works for the California Product Stewardship Council. ( Isabella Genovese / Noozhawk photo )

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Santa Barbara is tackling textile waste one recycling workshop at a time.

The Goleta Valley Community Center hosted a session on repurposing fabrics as part of a recent push for a **circular economy** of textiles. That's where old materials are repaired, reused, or recycled — rather than dumped into landfills.

“There's intrinsic value not only in the garment but in the fabrics,” said Joanne Brasch, director of advocacy for the California Product Stewardship Council, which hosted the workshop last week. “You can make new things.”

But that's rarely the case. The United States creates over 17 million tons of textile waste each year, nearly 85% of which end up in landfills, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.



A crowd attends the textile recycling workshop at the Goleta Valley Community Center.  
( Isabella Genovese / Noozhawk photo )

Santa Barbara County is attempting to change this, locally. As a hotspot for fabric manufacturing, the county is promoting a model for **extended producer responsibility**, which obliges companies to follow their textiles to the end of their lifetime, keeping them out of the dump.

“The fibershed of Santa Barbara is really strong,” Brasch said. “You have a lot of local producers, a lot of upcyclers, and designers like Patagonia and Deckers.”

The workshop, funded by **CalRecycle**, saw displays of clothing vendors’ sustainable upcycling projects: some boasting trendy mix-matched stitched pieces, others collecting donated pre-worn bras for women in need.

It hosted a range of speakers, from a Chumash tribal representative sharing indigenous tradition of “nothing left to waste,” to a manager from eco-friendly clothing brand **Toad&Co**, who encouraged “wash less, wear more” habits for garment longevity.





Textile waste dropped off outside the Goleta Valley Community Center.  
( Isabella Genovese / Noozhawk photo )

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State Senator Josh Newman, of Fullerton, recently proposed a law that would implement a statewide program for textile collection and recycling. Prospects for the [\*\*SB 707 bill\*\*](#) curbing fabric waste in California excited the event's attendees, who urged its passage.

“Everyone has to change,” said Brasch, pointing to a need for legislation that holds businesses accountable. “No one’s breaking any laws right now because we don’t have any.”

But even with legal backing, revamping old textiles is a difficult process. Synthetic materials are tricky to break down, requiring extensive time and money.

And staying local for recycling or upcycling clothing is optimal, according to Brasch, but community efforts are still in their infancy.

Some are completely out of the country.

Local waste hauler MarBorg Industries ships textiles it collects in Santa Barbara out to Western Africa, where the pieces are transformed into carpet pads.

“Our stuff gets sent overseas,” said Sarah Stark of MarBorg. “It’s not an ideal scenario.” She attended the event in search of local textile recipients who can give a fresh and innovative purpose to retired materials.

“We do as much as we can to keep items out of the landfills,” Stark said of Marborg. “But we want to find a new outlet, a domestic partnership.”



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MarBorg Industries' Sarah Stark staffing the waste hauler company's table at the textile recycling workshop.  
( Isabella Genovese / Noozhawk photo )

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The guilt is overwhelming for some, like Kimberly Nilsson, who feels shame just wearing a pair of store bought blue jeans — a common culprit of clothing waste.

“Look at Los Angeles, what they make and throw away,” said Nilsson, CEO of **Solid Waste Solutions, Inc.** “I love fashion, but it is an issue.”

Initiatives for a community-based life cycle of clothing fill her with hope.

Nilsson motioned to the room full of public, private and nonprofit collaborators working to improve and localize the system for textile disposal and recycling.

“Develop a program that can take the materials,” she said, resuming her perusal of the reworked vintage apparel. “That’s the key.”





Jessica Sneed accepting bra donations for underprivileged women in Santa Barbara.  
( Isabella Genovese / Noozhawk photo )

*Isabella Genovese is a Noozhawk contributing writer and UC Santa Barbara student.*