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California Industry Group Takes On Textile Waste

By Kate Nishimura

CPSC's committee members released recommendations on combatting textile waste.

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Textiles are the fifth most present material in residential and commercial waste streams, and efforts to combat the impact of discarded fabrics are falling woefully short, according to the California Product Stewardship Council ([CPSC](#)).

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Californians toss more than 1.2 million tons of textiles annually, and thus far, the industry's attempts to create pathways for reuse and recycling have proven "expensive, siloed, and lacking the transparency necessary for public investments," [CPSC's](#) Statewide Textiles Recovery Advisory Committee wrote in a new report. Insights from member organizations like Goodwill, Fibershed, Fashion Revolution, the City of Santa Barbara, the San Francisco Department of the Environment and Resource Recycling Systems have informed the committee's recommendations for federal, state and local policy regarding [textile waste](#).

The problem is a sizable one—not just because of the volume of waste, members wrote, but because of the diversity of materials that make up textiles and apparel. Local governments and operators of waste facilities are unable to process the materials effectively without implementing new, costly programs, and many of the garments donated to thrift stores and charities prove unsalable, condemning them to a landfill fate, too.

Meanwhile, consumers are operating on limited knowledge about the material makeup of the products they buy, and have even less insight into how to properly recycle goods once they are no longer needed. Brands have not been held sufficiently accountable for the recyclability of the products they sell, the group said, or for their failure to implement end-of-life management options, like [takeback programs](#).

Finding new avenues for national textile management will require the buy-in of private companies, governments and NGOs, the committee wrote. At a federal level, it recommended removing subsidies on virgin fossil fuels as well as certain tariffs on organic and recycled textiles, while investing more heavily in sustainable agriculture and domestic manufacturing. Regulations should be put in place to address PFAS chemicals commonly found in fabric treatments, as well as the use of fibers that shed [microplastics](#), while new standards and labeling should be created to help support the sorting and recycling of textile waste, the report said.

The state of California can support [textile waste](#) reform locally by putting in place tax incentives and relief programs for small businesses engaged in textile sustainability services, it suggested. Educational outreach campaigns would help consumers and industries engaged in heavy textile use, like hospitality, to find and engage with programs for recovery and [recycling](#).

The committee believes success hinges on the creation of an effective Extended Producer

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impacts to the environment at every stage during the production process. And when a product reaches the end of its life, the responsibility and cost of processing and recycling would fall primarily on its producer.

The ERP would drive businesses to band together to fund the growth of textile management efforts, with incentives like exemptions from certain fees. “For example, [B Corps](#) with takeback programs incorporating repair should pay less than others,” the committee wrote. The strategy would also create opportunities for recycled commodities markets to flourish, it said. Once usable textiles have been diverted into reuse, repair, and redesign, processes and infrastructure must be developed to handle materials that are harder to manage, like PFAS and [microplastics](#).

Building out these initiatives and addressing infrastructure gaps in California’s circular textiles economy will take investment from policymakers, the group wrote. State funded grants, loans and tax incentives would help spur the development of more impactful and widespread collection systems, larger facilities for textile sorting and consolidation, streamlined transportation of materials, and greater capacity for in-state processing of fibers into yarn and fabric. These efforts would have both ecological and economic benefits, the committee wrote, as they would cut carbon while creating jobs.

The state already boasts natural resources and a skilled labor force that set it apart from the rest of the country, and they stand to enhance its textile management efforts, it added. California leads the nation in sheep shorn for wool annually, and produces 90 percent of its long staple cotton. Recent investments in climate smart agriculture by the California Legislature will bolster fiber production within regenerative and biodiverse farms. Meanwhile, the recently passed [Garment Worker Protection Act](#) establishes California as a leader for socially responsible production. Stronger engagement and greater commitments to funding progress could benefit “an active industry ready to support the growing demand for sustainable textiles.”

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