

Between us, consumers in the UK have an astonishing £30 billion-worth of clothes lying unworn in wardrobes and drawers across the nation. According to WRAP's latest research – Valuing our clothes – the average household has around £4,000-worth of clothes, of which, almost a third hasn't been worn for at least a year!

WRAP's research showed there are three main reasons why we have so many clothes we no longer wear – they simply don't fit, they're suffering from wear or tear or we just haven't got round to turning them out. If we could make more use of these clothes, through alteration, repair, multiple reuse and recycling, there's great potential for consumers to realise some financial and environmental savings.



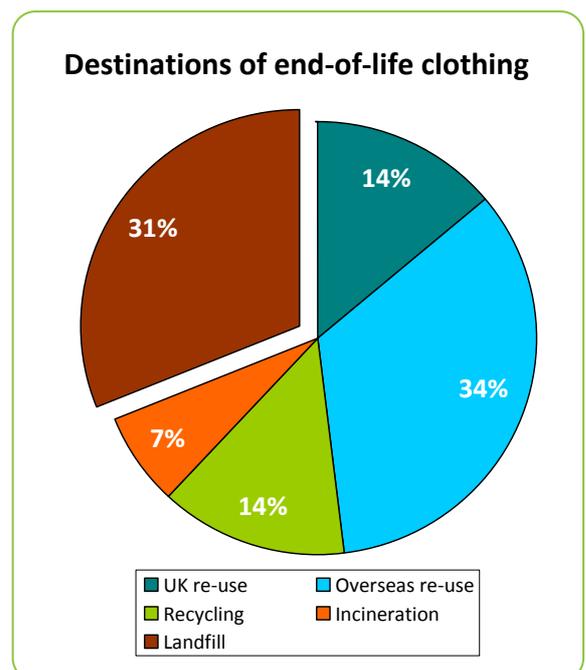
There are many ways in which we can extend the life of our unwanted clothing by passing them on to others (www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/more/reuse), via auction sites like eBay, through Freecycle, charity shops, a swishing party (<http://swishing.com/>) or with the help of the M&S 'shwopping' initiative (<http://www.marksandspencer.com/Shwop/b/1672188031>).

Even when items are no longer wearable or repairable, there are still opportunities to make use of this resource – whether you use them in craft projects or put them out for recycling and give them a new life in a range of industries from mining to motor manufacture.

How much raw material does the clothing sector consume and where does it go?

An estimated 1.14 million tonnes of clothes are supplied onto the UK market each year.

- **To produce these clothes, some 1.76 million tonnes of raw materials are used.** Around one-third of this figure becomes waste in the supply chain – a significant proportion of which is unavoidable.
- **An estimated 10,000 tonnes of waste is generated at the in-use stage.** This occurs when clothes are damaged while being cleaned – rather than becoming worn out – and then go to recycling, incineration or landfill.
- **An estimated 1.13 million tonnes of end-of-life clothing are no longer wanted by UK consumers** and are either re-used (540,000 tonnes, around 70% of which goes overseas), recycled (160,000 tonnes), incinerated (80,000 tonnes) or go to landfill (350,000 tonnes).



Making garments last longer

A number of factors affect whether a garment looks good and is used for longer. These include:

- How owners look after their clothes, e.g. if they follow washing instructions and care information
- Willingness to wear items repeatedly, e.g. as part of different outfits, or to buy preowned clothes
- Design features such as classic cut and fit, and cutting or built-in adjustability (e.g. hidden elastic, stretch fabrics) to promote comfort and a flattering versatile fit
- Technical aspects such as resilient fabrics, dyes and colours
- Consumer ability to repair and alter clothes



Increasing supply and demand for pre-owned clothing

Why take action?

- Around half of clothing is re-used at present, and over two-thirds of this goes overseas. Increasing the re-use rate in the UK and for export would reduce the total waste each year.
- There is significant willingness to buy or receive pre-owned clothes – more than two-thirds of adults have done so in the past year.
- Some 30% of clothing has not been worn for the last year and four in five people own at least some clothes that have not been worn because they no longer fit or need altering. This indicates there may be substantial volume of good quality clothing suitable for reuse.

Opportunities for consumers:

- Get better value from household expenditure, help the environment, experience the buzz of going shopping and wear clothes that are “new to me” – by buying pre-owned clothes
- Realise the value of value of unwanted clothing by selling it or donating it to charities or other organisations for re-use or recycling.
- Access a wider choice of fashionable clothes for social occasions – through hiring, exchanging clothes with other people or by purchasing quality pre-owned clothes through charity shops, online sellers, vintage shops and other retail outlets.

Keeping clothes out of landfill

More than 30% of clothing is estimated to go to landfill. If all this material was donated for re-use or recycling, it would provide £140 million or more (at June 2012 prices).

Nearly half of adults put at least some clothing in the rubbish bin – usually because they think it couldn't be used again for any purpose, or it's too personal to get rid of in another way. They would do this less if they knew that the textiles themselves – in any state – were valuable to recyclers.

Every year Somerset spends over £300,000 landfilling clothes which haven't been segregated for recycling; this cost rises to £450,000 when you include other textiles like bedding and curtains.

Please keep clothes out of your rubbish bin! Even damaged or heavily worn clothing has value – bag it (to keep dry) and put it out with your recycling.

