

The Biological Killer

Plastic pervades modern life, and menstruation is no exception. Menstruation is stigmatised worldwide, considering roughly 26% and more than 800 million individuals menstruate daily. With the immense number of menstruating individuals, popularised products such as pads or tampons are utilised in alarming quantities. The primary advantage of these products is that they are priced at a more 'affordable' rate; why wouldn't one use either to aid with their flow? Menstruation is a biological process most individuals will experience, however, the unseen harmful environmental impact of our sanitary products is incomprehensible to accept. This article shall shed light on why we must become aware of both the environmental impacts and harsh realities of menstrual products nowadays.

To most people, the amount of excess waste produced by either a pad or tampon is disregarded. Considering the factors influencing someone's menstruation, each individual may go through various sanitary products during their cycle. At New Zealand supermarket Countdown, a package of 18-20 pads or tampons may start at a price as low as \$2.00 -

\$3.00. Often, these products are readily available at the lowest prices and simultaneously maintain the most plastic packaging possible. Since the middle of the 20th century, many tampons and menstrual pads have contained plastic; sometimes for reasons that "improve" the design (tampon applicators), but often for reasons less crucial. It is often easy to forget about the environmental impact of a product due to its countless benefits. In New Zealand, these menstrual products are emptied, compacted and carted off to the landfill in a skip where bins are sanitised, perfumed, coiffed and ready to go back on the front line again. Due to landfills acquiring no air and very little water, things are not being



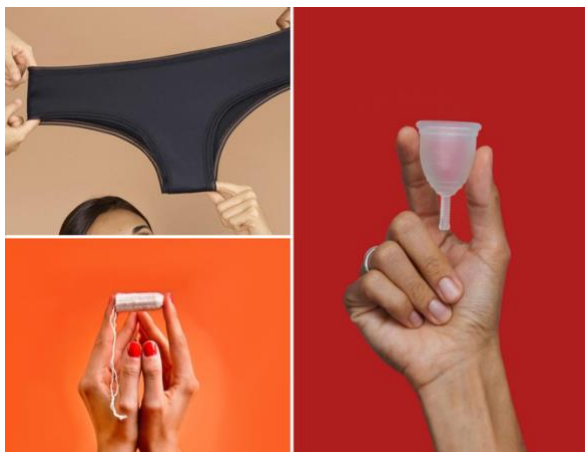
Sanitary Product Excess provided by 'Real Life Rebs'

broken down. Roughly 12% of all domestic waste is nappies and sanitary products, and it takes anywhere 450 years for a sanitary pad to decompose. As our climate changes, the planet becomes hotter, and the plastic breaks down into methane and ethylene, therefore increasing the rate of climate change and perpetuating the cycle. This correlates to goal 13 of the United Nations sustainable development program with the focus of 'Climate Action'. The SDGs aim is to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Remember those pads you used at thirteen? They will still be decomposing by the time you have passed.

Furthermore, despite the extensive usage of period products contributing to climate change, it is essential to identify individuals affected by poverty and plastic bans. In this first world country, we live a relatively sheltered life. Most schools, workplaces, and businesses uphold the standard of maintaining sanitary bins and catering to menstruation. However, the dark truth is that one in 12 New Zealand students miss school due to 'period poverty'. Period poverty is defined as when those on low incomes cannot afford or access suitable period products. As period products such as pads and tampons are defined as single-use products, it is unsustainable for individuals living in poverty to purchase \$3.00 packets every cycle.

When living on \$10.00 a day, a \$3.00 packet of pads can reduce the ability to purchase healthy, fresh food conducive to concentration and learning. New Zealand's way to combat period poverty is by implementing free sanitary products in all schools, however, Mexico City in a bid to stop climate change, has individuals scrabbling for tampons. According to 'Global Citizen', Mexico City enforced a single-use plastic ban on Jan. 1, making it illegal for retailers to stock tampons with plastic applicators on their shelves. The decision was made as the minister stated that single waste items are not "essential". Although the decision supports the environmental movement, it would be more appropriate to phase out the product rather than diminish it entirely. Goal 6 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Program focusing on 'Clean Water and Sanitation' is particularly relevant in this case. 2.4 billion people on the planet lack access to improved sanitation, as women and girls are specifically affected by this. Women and girls require safe, clean, and culturally acceptable facilities where they can safely and discreetly access and dispose of menstrual products.

We are conditioned as adolescents to veer towards essential sanitary norms such as pads and tampons, yet nowadays, with the taboo of discussing menstruation collapsing, countless companies are embracing menstruation and creating products beneficial for both people and the environment. Individuals implement an "out of sight, out of mind" perspective on our products, as we seemingly disregard the damage we contribute to. The average woman utilizes approximately 20 pads/tampons per month, equating to 240 products per year. One



Alternative products mentioned, provided by 'Good On You.'

solution to this ongoing dilemma are 'silicone cups', available from various manufacturers. Silicone cups portray the same role as a tampon and are a far more economical option, lasting for ten years. Additionally, period-proof underwear has recently made its way onto the market. New Zealand brand 'AWWA' is an example of period-proof underwear, which prides itself on being a climate positive business. Even if you are not quite ready to take the plunge into sustainability, eco-friendly and organic alternative pads and tampons are biodegradable and free from harsh chemicals often found in mainstream

products. In my local area, the Hibiscus Coast the alternatives to mainstream products are becoming increasingly popular with knowledge about these products circulating social media, pop-up markets and supermarkets. SDG goal 12 of the United Nations 'Responsible and Production' requires that we urgently reduce our ecological footprint by changing the way we produce and consume goods and resources like pads and tampons replaced by silicone cups or period underwear.

In conclusion, although our society is breaking the stigmatised topic of period talk, there are still multiple concepts that need discussion. Factors like environmental impact and period poverty need to be acknowledged globally. This would not be done without mainstream support from favoured sanitary companies such as "U" and "Libra". Change cannot be conducted without compromise from sizable companies. **Iti noa ana he pito mata. From a withered tree, a flower blooms.**

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