

Uniforms are littering!

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Lots of school uniforms are made out of polyester.

Photo: Amy Ardern.

You may be a tidy kiwi, but did you know your clothes may be littering without you knowing? A lot of New Zealand children don't have a choice whether they litter or not. Surprisingly, most school uniforms are bad for the environment.

About 60% of material used in clothing is plastic.¹ Lots of school uniforms are made out of polyester. New Zealand charity Sustainable Coastlines say that every time you wash polyester, little microfibres

¹ "Dive Deeper: plastic clothing." *Sustainable Coastlines*, sustainablecoastlines.org/resources/clothing/ Accessed 4 August 2021.

come out. It leaks from your clothes, pollutes the ocean, and kills sea life. Microfibres have been found in the air, rivers, soil, rain, drinking water, table salt and even in your relaxing holiday beer! Uniforms that are made out of plastic are bad for the environment.

Josh Borthwick, Sustainable Coastlines CEO, says the charity would like to see only natural fibres used in school uniforms, such as wool, hemp and organic cotton.² “In an ideal world these would all be organic fair trade. Parents should definitely buy and sell secondhand uniforms wherever possible.”



The older your clothes, the less microfibers shed.³ When surveyed, about half of the students at Birdwood School in Auckland had brand new uniforms and only 29 students had reused uniforms. Reused uniforms are also a good option because you are buying less polyester.

Are we tidy kiwis if our clothes are littering?

Photo: Amy Ardern

Some students don't have a choice whether to wear plastic or not. Out of 10 primary schools on the New Zealand Uniform website, four schools had polar fleece jumpers.⁴ Viv Carr, the deputy principal at Birdwood School, said it would be a good idea for schools to have wool jumpers instead of polyester.⁵ “It would be fantastic if we could start wearing wool jumpers, but that would be up for a New Zealand company to start producing.” However, Ms Carr said that wool might be too expensive and too hard to wash.

If natural materials are too expensive to buy, there are ways to wash your clothes without harming the environment.⁶ Wash your clothes at a lower temperature, use a lower rotation, do a full load, and wash your clothes less.

² Borthwick, Josh. Email interview. 1 Aug. 2021.

³ “Dive Deeper: plastic clothing.” *Sustainable Coastlines*, sustainablecoastlines.org/resources/clothing/ Accessed 4 Aug. 2021.

⁴ *New Zealand Uniforms*, nzuniforms.com/ Accessed 4 Aug. 2021.

⁵ Carr, Viv. Personal interview. 1 Aug. 2021.

⁶ “Dive Deeper: plastic clothing.” *Sustainable Coastlines*, sustainablecoastlines.org/resources/clothing/ Accessed 4 Aug. 2021.
