

Disruptions to the textile supply chain from store closings have effected every step. These disruptions have resulted in unsold merchandise sitting in stores, warehouses, ports and garment manufacturers. The industry has put huge effort into finding positive solutions on what to do with these garments.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 16.9 million tons of textiles go into landfill and incineration every year. Options for landfill diversion include reuse, resale, swap, donations, then chemical and mechanical recyclers.
- 3 main strategies brands are using for excess inventory, in order of preference: long-term storage - store and sell same season next year, sales & discounting, and donations.
- A goal of circularity in apparel is to keep garments in “highest use”. This means maintaining the embedded resource value as much as possible: allowing the manufacturing inputs of energy, water, and chemistry embedded in that garment to be maintained. From the brand or retailer’s perspective, highest use also includes the option that maintains economic value for the business.
- Some materials are easier to recycle compared with others, even when damaged. Recycling markets need to be further developed to increase recyclability of all materials.
- Certain types of textile products are more valuable in a recycling system. Home textiles can more easily be converted to cleaning materials compared with wearable textiles that have more spandex content. Apparel is also more likely to end up in the waste stream because there is more turnover in use compared with home textiles that are kept longer.
- To scale up circular systems we need technical solutions for sorting, shredding, collections, which hasn’t yet received as much attention compared with chemical recycling. Currently, most apparel sorting is shipped overseas to be done by hand, then shipped back to US for downcycling which isn’t efficient.
- Labelling is an important factor in apparel recycling: if the garments aren’t labelled with original tags when they reach the sorting station, the sorting facility can’t see what materials are in its composition and therefore won’t know how to recycle it.
- An important solution area for apparel is durability, designing products to last longer and with the expectation of having multiple owners. This requires designing for the physical and aesthetic dimension to keeping products in use for a long time.



In the post-covid landscape, fewer companies think of themselves as ‘fast fashion’ anymore. They are trying to create products that last longer and customers will love. So retailers will likely have smaller orders with fewer styles.”

Julia Hughes, President, United States Fashion Industry Association



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