

3 THINGS

OUR CLOTHING TAGS ARE TRYING TO TELL US

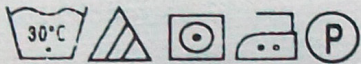
How to Read Between the Lines for a More Responsible Wardrobe

It may not be surprising to read “Made In China” on our garment tag — but what does the country of origin really tell us about our clothing? Knowing the origin country alone isn’t enough information to understand how ethical or sustainable our clothing is, but it’s an important piece of the puzzle. Here are a few things you can learn about how responsible your garment is by understanding its country of origin, fiber content, and care instructions.

AN OVERVIEW:

MADE IN CHINA

100% COTTON



Machine wash cold,
dark colors separately,
Non-chlorine bleach
only if desired, Tumble
dry low heat,
Remove promptly,
Warm iron if needed.

1 COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Where Your Clothes Were Made

FYI: A majority of garment workers worldwide [aren't paid a living wage](#) and factories often cut corners on workplace safety.

Bottom Line: Do your research on brands before you buy, and if they're not transparent about ethics standards for their garment workers, they may have something to hide.

Take Action: Ask #WhoMadeMyClothes on social media to start a conversation with brands you love about ethical manufacturing.

2 FIBER CONTENT

What Their Fabric Is Made Of

FYI: Fiber content explains how a garment will react in different temperatures, and the possible lifespan of the material. It also gives us an idea of the garment's environmental impact across the garment's lifecycle.

Bottom Line: Both [natural](#) and [synthetic](#) materials have advantages and disadvantages regarding comfort, durability, and environmental impact.

Take Action: Be mindful of the source fibers in your clothing by getting informed on their ethical and environmental impacts.

3 CARE INSTRUCTIONS

How To Launder Your Garments

FYI: The process of washing and drying garments can take a toll on human and environmental health.

Bottom Line: Be aware that the [care instructions on your garment often aren't the only way to wash it](#), and they may not be the most health or environment friendly options.

Take Action: Wash in cold water, use eco-friendly detergent, reduce frequency of washing and drying, and use dryer balls instead of dryer sheets or softener.

IMAGE / MALCOLM KOO

CLOTHES CAPTIONING: What Our Tags are Really Telling Us

1 COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: WHERE YOUR CLOTHES WERE MADE

Thanks to reports and campaigning from ethical fashion advocacy organizations like [Fashion Revolution](#), we know that a majority of garment workers worldwide aren't paid a living wage. According to U.K. labor rights campaign, [Labour Behind the Label](#), there is still a [huge difference between the minimum wage and the living wage](#) in most countries where our clothes are made.

In 2015, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka only paid garment workers 18 and 20 percent of the living wage respectively, with Cambodia, India, Indonesia and China also coming in significantly under the mark. This is important because globally, around 80 percent of garment workers are women aged 18-35 who are the main income earners for their household.

This gap between wages paid and the true living wage causes a ripple effect that can leave entire families without the resources to cover basic needs. Beyond unlivable wages, worker safety is often disregarded by garment factories in these countries. Poor regulation, a lack of

factory inspectors, and the constant influx of orders from fast fashion brands means that factories consistently cut corners on workplace safety. Workers pay the price with their health and all too often, [their lives](#).

That said, simply reading the origin country of your garment can't tell the whole story on labor. There are strides being made by responsible brands to radically [increase transparency](#) and ethics standards across their manufacturing and supply chains, beginning with safe conditions and fair wages at factories worldwide.

BOTTOM LINE:

Do your research on brands before you buy, and if they're not transparent about ethics standards for their garment workers, they may have something to hide.

TAKE ACTION:

Ask #WhoMadeMyClothes on social media to start a conversation with brands you love about ethical manufacturing.

2 FIBER CONTENT: WHAT THEIR FABRIC IS MADE OF

All clothing in the U.S. has a fiber content label. Fiber content explains what our garments' fabric is made from, how it will react to different temperatures, and the possible lifespan of the material. It can also give us an idea of the garment's environmental impact from creation to wear, and ultimately, disposal.

Natural fibers come from plant or animal sources, and when farmed responsibly, can have less environmental impact than synthetic fabrics over their life cycle. They allow our skin to breathe better and are often more comfortable; however they have a tendency to wrinkle and/or shrink when exposed to very hot water and drying methods. The most common natural fibers used in clothing are cotton, linen, wool and silk.

Synthetic fibers tend to be more resilient and longer lasting because they're comprised of man-made chemicals, which also makes them more detrimental to the environment. Each synthetic fabric has specific care instructions that must be followed to prevent damage to the fabric. For example, some synthetic fibers can melt when exposed

to a hot dryer or iron. The most common synthetic fibers used in clothing are polyester, nylon, rayon, acetate, acrylic and spandex. Many people find natural fibers to be much more comfortable, which has led to the garment industry to experiment with and combine natural and synthetic for optimal comfort and durability.

BOTTOM LINE:

Both natural and synthetic materials have advantages and disadvantages regarding comfort, durability, and environmental impact. Natural fibers biodegrade, but can have negative environmental impacts if farmed irresponsibly. Synthetic fibers are not biodegradable, but can be made from recycled materials.

TAKE ACTION:

Be mindful of the source fibers in your clothing by getting informed on their ethical and environmental impacts. When you do shop, do so wisely and selectively. Second hand shopping is a great way to shop without contributing to the unsustainable over-production of fiber.

CLOTHES CAPTIONING: What Our Tags are Really Telling Us

WEIGHING THE IMPACTS COTTON VS. POLYESTER



Cotton farming requires [large amounts of water](#), land, and fossil fuels (to operate machinery used for harvesting). The amount of pesticides used on conventional cotton has decreased over time, however it is still the [highest amount used out of any crop](#), though [organic cotton](#) has significantly less negative impacts. Cotton is biodegradable, so it will breakdown relatively quickly once discarded. The fabric can also be reused easily, requiring 97% less energy than brand new material needs during manufacturing.

Polyester synthetics are and made from [fossil fuels and other chemicals](#), and the process of extracting these non-renewable resources can destroy plant and animal habitats. Garments created from synthetic fibers are non-biodegradable, spending up to 200 years in a landfill before they decompose. Though [polyester can be made of recyclable materials such as plastic bottles](#) which reduces waste, polyester production rates are continually increasing, vastly exceeding decomposition time for existing synthetics in landfills, creating more waste on our planet.

3 CARE INSTRUCTIONS: HOW TO LAUNDRY YOUR GARMENTS

The care instructions on our garment tags were [designed to provide guidance](#) on how to clean our clothes. But there's more than one way to wash a shirt, and the care label doesn't share all the options.

The process of washing and drying garments can take a toll on human and environmental health. (Check out [AEG's Care Label Project](#) for detailed information on the detrimental effects of over washing). Over the decades, companies' development of detergent products have included more and more harmful chemicals. On the surface, we see the products are providing exactly what we want: fresh-scented, stain-free, "clean" garments. But what we don't see, is how these chemicals are impacting our health and environment.

The chemical phosphate is common in detergent, and once it gets into our water systems, it can hinder plant growth and harm marine life over time. Synthetic surfactants, also common in detergents, are known to cause skin, eye and respiratory irritation. If you frequent dry cleaners, understand that they too use harsh chemicals in their processes. Perchloroethylene, or "perc" is generally used by workers and damage the brain and nervous system, as well as cause cancer.

BOTTOM LINE:

Be aware that the care instructions on your garment often aren't the only way to wash it, and they may not be the most health or environment friendly options.

TAKE ACTION:

Wash in cold water.

- Washing in cold water is just as effective as hot water.
- Reduces energy needed to wash garments. ~90% of a washer's energy goes to heating water.
- The heat used for hot water leads to five times as many greenhouse gas emissions.

Use eco-friendly detergent or [make your own](#).

- Some store bought options: [Seventh Generation](#) | [Biokleen](#) | [Method](#)

Reduce frequency of washing and drying.

- Washers and dryers put high pressure on your garments and over time will [slowly break down the fabric](#).
- Most garments are perfectly fine to be worn multiple times before needing to be washed, simply air out on a hanger between wears.

Use [dryer balls](#) instead of dryer sheets or softener.

- Less energy is used by the dryer, as dryer balls increase drying efficiency.
- They contain no harmful chemicals.