

We Have All Heard

By Sarah Patey

We've all heard of it: "climate change," "global warming." These are some of the scariest buzzwords that carry with them images of droughts, fires, hurricanes, floods, and oil spills. These ideas can be hard and intimidating to process, however, we need to make a difference.

Understanding the climate crisis on an individual level can feel overwhelming and futile. When the majority of the media simultaneously puts the responsibility for all change on individuals, while telling us thinking change can truly happen is idealistic and naive: it can feel like we are fighting a losing battle. Even so, it is incredibly important for all of us to appreciate the climate crisis personally.

When we have knowledge, we have power.

We have the ability to recognize what our local, national, and global governments are doing in response to the climate crisis. Understanding arms us with words and actions, as well as insulating us from propaganda in the form of greenwashing. This is important because we live in a media-rich culture. When we get how sustainability actually works, and what is truly environmentally conscious, we can make change.

Understanding climate change helps us know which companies are helping the environment, doing nothing, or profiting off the idea of sustainability without following up.

While a consumer society does not often cause useful action, there are ways to use it to our benefit. Putting our money where our mouth is is the best way to do that. When we spend our money on products made by companies that care for the environment we are supporting those ideals and making it possible for beneficial change to continue. This leads to other companies realizing environmentalism is profitable. This can bring about good change, but it also can cause other companies to falsely advertise in the form of “greenwashing.”

According to Wikipedia, “Greenwashing, also called green sheen, is a form of advertising or marketing spin that deceptively uses green PR and green marketing to persuade the public that an organization's products, goals, or policies are environmentally friendly.” Unfortunately, while this concept may sound simple, the deception goes far deeper than dressing a product in green. “Greenwashing” includes the misuse of common buzzwords such as “bio-friendly,” “eco-friendly,” “earth-friendly,” “natural,” and (perhaps most misleading of all) “organic.” Unless a company has a certification from a corporation that is *separate* from the company itself, it is not necessarily true. You can tell a product is genuinely organic through the “USDA organic” certification logo. This idea holds for other concepts such as

“cruelty-free,” “fair trade,” “recycled,” and “non-GMO,” to name a few. All of these common ideas

are used by companies to convince people they are making the right choice. To make sure the product you are considering is truly environmentally conscious, look for a 2nd party certification.

There are many reasons why shopping locally is so much better than shopping from big companies and corporations. First of all, big corporations, specifically the top 100 companies, release 71% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Big companies are so successful because of, among many things, their cheap prices and the convenience of getting the product. A great example of this is Shien, a company that has moved past fast fashion and earned its moniker of “ultra-fast fashion” or “real-time fashion.” The channel Future Proof put it best when talking about the equally bad company Temu, “If you’re getting a great deal, chances are there is someone along that product's life course that *isn't* getting a great deal.” Companies like Shien, Temu, H&M, Zara, and Amazon can not make products so quickly and for so little money without people and the planet suffering along the way.

If the way these companies abuse and take advantage of people or the planet doesn't convince you to shop elsewhere if the convenience and cheap prices still draw you in, I would suggest thinking about this:

Temu's products are so cheap that Temu is not turning a profit on their orders. This is a strategy to make their brand so enticing it eventually becomes the go-to place people think of when they want to shop. This has been seen before: Amazon did a similar thing with bookselling, dropping their prices so much they cornered the market on bookselling, driving other booksellers out. Once they had a monopoly they jacked up their prices again. So if you think these amazing deals and cheap things are worth it, just know it won't always be this cheap. If we as a society continue to ignore the facts and line the pockets of these big corporations, we will look around one day and realize there is nowhere to buy truly good quality, ethically produced, and lasting goods.

This might seem like a hopeless situation, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel: small business. While small, ethical businesses are often more expensive with fewer products, these very facts point to their sustainable nature. Finding and patronizing small businesses instead of big companies is a great way we can all support the environment.

When living our everyday lives, we can make decisions that have big impacts, good or bad. When shopping for clothes, instead of going somewhere like Marshalls consider a local alternative such as John Tarr, Sand Castles, Floating Lotus, One Ocean One Love, or one of the many others. When going out for coffee, instead of going somewhere like Dunkin or Starbucks, consider a local coffee shop like Brothers Brew,

Bean, Leaf, Latoff Farmhouse Kitchen, Cake Ann, or any other. Thrift shops are always a great way to find clothes and other things in an environmentally friendly way. Places like Second Glance, Sea Again, The Dress Code, and Bananas are great options.

Shopping local is a great and simple way to support the environment, and business owners, and connect with your community. It's a way we can take back the power and choose to give our support to the people who are helping rather than hurting our planet. Don't let the media or influential companies make you think change is not possible. We make changes every day.