

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 28, 2023

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

The rise of so-called “fast fashion” has become an urgent environmental problem. Heavily reliant on cheap manufacturing, constant consumption, and short-lived use, fast fashion’s significant environmental and climate impacts are of growing concern to the American public. It is estimated that the fashion industry is responsible for more carbon emissions than all international flights and maritime shipping combined, or about 10% of total annual global emissions.

The rate of waste from textiles has increased over the last two decades, in line with the advent of fast fashion. In 2018, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated 17 million tons of textiles were generated in the United States, with 11.3 million tons landfilled, making up 7.7% of all municipal solid waste landfilled that year.<sup>1</sup> This is a 55% per capita increase compared to the 20% increase in the overall waste stream between 2000 and 2018, implying the increase is tied to factors beyond population growth. As the rate that clothing is produced and discarded increases, particularly concerning is that only 15% of clothing in the U.S. is recycled or reused, with the rest either incinerated or sent to landfills for disposal.<sup>2</sup>

While local governments have the primary role in operating recycling programs, the federal government is an important stakeholder and contributes to these efforts in a variety of ways. Under federal law, certain federal agencies, such as EPA, help encourage recycling through education and outreach efforts to help build public support and awareness around this issue. For example, EPA’s National Recycling Strategy aims to help build a circular economy and increase the recycling rate to 50% by 2030.<sup>3</sup>

Given the significant and growing impacts fast fashion has on our environment, we are concerned about the ability of our nation to responsibly manage discarded clothing and increasing amounts of textile waste. To that end, and to better help Congress address this challenge, we request GAO’s assistance in addressing the following questions:

1. To what extent is the U.S. textiles sector implementing practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/textiles-material-specific-data>

<sup>2</sup> J. King, "Textile Reuse and Recycling: A SMART Perspective," NIST Workshop: Facilitating a Circular Economy for Textiles, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/circulareconomy/national-recycling-strategy>

2. What actions has the EPA taken and what additional actions could EPA take to develop technologies and infrastructure to increase the amount of textiles that are recycled?
3. What are the potential benefits and challenges of making the American textile industry more circular?
4. To what extent, if at all, does EPA conduct outreach to states, industry, and the public to educate them regarding textile waste?
5. What additional actions, if any, could the federal government take to help reduce textile waste?

Please contact Lisa Pahel in Congresswoman Pingree's office at [lisa.pahel@mail.house.gov](mailto:lisa.pahel@mail.house.gov) or Jack Rayburn with Congresswoman DeLauro's office at [jack.rayburn@mail.house.gov](mailto:jack.rayburn@mail.house.gov) with any questions related to this request.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies



Rosa DeLauro  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Committee