



2017

# STATE OF REUSE REPORT

Give A Sh!rt™ About Your Clothing Footprint



# Introduction

## Methodology

To learn more about how consumers perceive and deal with “stuff” and its overall role in their community and the environment, Savers/Value Village commissioned Edelman Intelligence to conduct a survey of 2,006 people age 18 or older from the general population in the U.S. and Canada, as well as oversamples of consumers age 18 or older in 5 key markets: Boston (503), Seattle (505), Las Vegas (500), Toronto (500) and Vancouver (502).

The survey was conducted online from Jan. 30 to Feb. 7, 2017. The margins of error are calculated at +/-2.19 percent for the North American general population sample; +/-3.10 percent in country comparisons; +/-4.1 percent in generational comparisons; and +/- 4.38 percent in metro area comparisons.

Note: “North Americans” refers to consumers in the general population in the U.S. and Canada, including generational, gender, and parent and non-parent comparisons.

## Stuff.

We all have it, and for many of us, we have *too much* of it. With changing seasons, fashion cycles and cultural trends, the only constant that remains is a chase for the new. We fill our closets and homes with what’s “in,” leaving whatever is “out” to be, too often, thrown out. And according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), we are throwing out more and more used clothing and household goods.<sup>1</sup> Most of us strive to be good stewards of our communities and the planet, yet responsibility and convenience are put at odds when it comes to an increasingly common dilemma: What do we do with all our “stuff”?

This is just one of the questions we set out to answer with the second annual **Savers State of Reuse Report**. What we learned this year builds on our previous research: nearly half of North Americans (46 percent) say they have “way too much stuff”—an increase of four percentage points in just one year.

People continue to accumulate more stuff. In fact, the world now consumes more than 80 billion pieces of new clothing every year<sup>ii</sup>, with Americans alone buying four times as much clothing as they did in 1980.<sup>iii</sup>

2 Additionally, there is still insufficient diversion of items that can be reused or repurposed from trash cans and landfills. Data from the EPA on clothing and textile waste reports that roughly 84 percent, or 26 billion pounds, of textiles are still heading into landfills.<sup>iv</sup> This means only 16 percent of clothing and textiles are recycled, or as defined by the EPA, collected, processed and turned into new products as materials that would otherwise be thrown away as trash and turning them into new products.<sup>v</sup>

Yet, the Council for Textile Recycling found that 95 percent of worn or torn textiles could be reused or recycled.<sup>vi</sup> Our throw-away mentality has created

a cycle of missed opportunities, not only for the environment but also for our communities. A large percentage of used clothing, textiles or household goods sent to the landfill could be donated to local organizations to support community-based programs and services.

Fortunately, enthusiasm for reuse (donating and purchasing used items) is strong and growing. 81 percent of respondents said they donated unwanted goods in 2016, with 33 percent explicitly noting that they donated more in 2016 than they did in 2015. Nearly one in five say they plan to continue this trend by donating even more in 2017. People are also continuing to purchase used goods—83 percent reported buying used items.

While people are donating more, the report data also showed that over half of people still admitted to throwing away used clothing and household goods. This is likely due to the finding that there are persistent misconceptions around what can be reused.

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### Thrifting is on the rise, with millennials leading the way

- 36 percent say thrifting has become more popular among their generation (40 percent of millennials)
- 31 percent say thrifting has become more popular among their friends (37 percent of millennials)
- 28 percent say thrifting has become more popular among their family (33 percent of millennials)

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### Donation Motivations: When push comes to give

- 77 percent donate clothes that no longer fit.
- 42 percent donate when they are tired of the current items and want something new.
- 41 percent donate when they run out of closet space.



This lack of understanding can be compared to the misconceptions and lack of awareness that existed around recycling paper, plastics, glass and aluminum in the 1980s and 1990s. People couldn't imagine recycling their cans or putting paper in a special bin; now it is the norm. Just as the issue of recycling was addressed with education, so can the issue of textile reuse and recycling be addressed over time with continued education and awareness.

As a society, we're making progress on moving towards a circular economy, but there's still a long way to go when it comes to the stewardship of valuable natural resources and changing consumer habits, particularly around clothing and textile use and disposal.

When we throw away our used clothes and household goods, we are also throwing away the raw materials used to make them. Consider the environmental impact of what goes into making a common, everyday outfit: a T-shirt and pair of blue jeans. It can take up to 700 gallons of water to make one new cotton T-shirt—more than the average person drinks in five years—and more than 1,800 gallons of water to make one new pair of jeans.<sup>vii</sup>

Water is only *one* of the natural resources used in the manufacturing of new clothes and household goods. So, why are we so quick to throw them out? As people become more knowledgeable on the impact of their clothing consumption and disposal habits, their behaviors should change, helping to reduce waste and continue moving toward a circular economy.


The Savers State of Reuse Report sheds light on these important questions, provides more clarity on misperceptions and suggests ways we can all 'give a sh!rt™' about our clothing footprint.

# Give a Sh!rt™ About Your Clothing Footprint\*


Landfills are turning into laundry piles—we throw out a sh!rt ton that could be reused

 **26** Billion pounds of clothing and textiles go into landfills each year, yet 95% could be reused or recycled

 **54%** reported they still throw out used clothing instead of donating

 **62%** threw items away because they didn't think a donation center would take them

People care about helping their local communities

 **71%** say a key benefit to donating unwanted items is knowing that others could be positively impacted

 **8 in 10** donated in 2016

 **76%** consider donating clothing and home goods a form of charitable giving


People don't understand the impact their clothing has on the environment and want to learn more to make more informed shopping and disposal decisions

**75%** agreed that

“If I better understood how my actions hurt or helped the planet, I would be more likely to make environmentally conscious decisions.”

It can take up to:

 **700** gallons of water to make one new cotton T-shirt

 **1800** gallons of water to make one new pair of jeans

60% of people thought leaving the lights on overnight used more energy than it takes to make one new pair of jeans.

 **111** kW•h to make one new pair of jeans

 **16** kW•h to leave the lights on overnight



\* Statistics shown are percentages of the total number of research respondents

# Demystifying Misperceptions

A reused product, whether an article of clothing or a household good, doesn't require additional resources to remain in circulation. Keeping reused products in the marketplace or fashion cycle might take no more than a fresh eye or a quick trip to a donation location.

Unfortunately, many items are deemed not worthy of being reused by consumers. This year's data again confirms that most consumers grossly underestimate the value of and ability to extend the life of their unwanted things. Of those who acknowledged they threw used clothes and/or household goods into the trash, almost two-thirds (62 percent) did so because they didn't think any donation center would take their items. That's thousands and thousands of toasters and dish towels, prom dresses and tricycles, that could be recycled or reused instead of added to the growing mountains of landfill waste.

The range of misperceptions is staggering. For many households, it feels like there are never enough plastic containers to store leftover food, and often those containers (such as Tupperware) end up in the trash. Nearly 40 percent of respondents mistakenly believe that used food storage containers cannot be donated. Once cleaned, used plastic or glass food storage containers can easily be reused again and again by the original owner or by someone else.

Food containers aren't the only instance where people misunderstand what could be reused. The data also showed that:

- 3 in 4 believe that they can't donate torn or soiled clothing.
- 7 in 10 believe they can't donate a sock with a hole in it.

These are both untrue. Local community donation centers and donation bins are able to collect such items in their current state, and are then sorted for processing. Unwearable clothing, even socks with holes, can be repurposed into something useful such as rags or insulation used for homes around the world.



believe that used food storage containers (e.g. Tupperware) cannot be donated



believe that they can't donate torn or soiled clothing



believe they can't donate a sock with a hole in it



## We're Thinking Locally

Despite lingering misconceptions about reuse, people do understand the impact of their donations. 76 percent consider donating clothing and home goods as a form of charitable giving and 85 percent say it is important to them to give back to their community.

One impactful way to encourage more people to avoid disposing of their clothing is to show how their donation can benefit their local community. To better understand the motivations behind people's charitable giving, we asked them about the preferred destination of their donations. 78 percent said they would prefer their donation benefits a local cause or issue they care about. In fact, 71 percent say a key benefit to donating unwanted items is knowing that others could be positively impacted. If more people understood the connection between the items they no longer need and the way these items could benefit people in their community, donations would increase.

A key takeaway from the data is that people consider community impact to be more important than environmental impact when it comes to their decision to donate used items. While 51 percent donate used clothing and household goods to help their local community, only 13 percent do so to help the environment. This gap is even further pronounced when respondents were forced to choose whether their donations should benefit the community or the environment. 78 percent wanted their donations of used goods to benefit their community compared to the 22 percent who wanted their donations to benefit the environment.

It is clear that people want to help those in their community. Ensuring that used clothing and household goods get a second life through donations will not only help the local community, but will also benefit the environment.

## And the Impacts Are Global

We know now that people want to responsibly dispose of used clothing and household goods through donations to help the local community. However, based on our research, there appears to be a clear disconnect between using and throwing out unneeded clothing and the natural resources that go into manufacturing those goods in the first place.

Most people are astonished when they discover how making a single cotton T-shirt can require not only 700 gallons of water but also other manufacturing inputs that impact the environment, like nine pounds of fossil fuels and one-third of a pound of pesticides<sup>xiii ix</sup>. That is a significant burden for the earth in terms of resources used, especially considering how the scarcity of water and greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels are known to be two of the main contributors to climate change.

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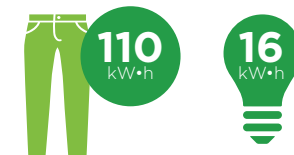
Leaving the lights on overnight has more impact than purchasing one pair of new jeans.

**False.**

60% of people thought leaving the lights on overnight used more energy.

**Truth.**

Creating a pair of new jeans actually has greater impact<sup>xi</sup> than leaving the lights on all night (8 hours)<sup>x</sup>.



The data showed that people still do not fully grasp the link between their clothing consumption and its environmental impact. When asked a series of questions in which respondents were forced to pick which action had a greater environmental impact—their clothing consumption or another daily habit (i.e. taking a 10-minute shower), a majority falsely believed that the resources consumed by the daily habit outweighed the resources that went into making their clothes.

Similarly, people also underestimate the global, environmental consequences of throwing out their clothing. Only 32 percent of people understood that the clothes they throw away go into the landfill and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions like other trash<sup>xiv</sup>.

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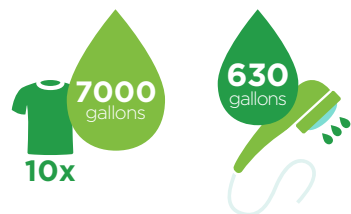
Taking a 10-minute shower every day for a month has greater impact than throwing away 10 T-shirts a year.

## False.

54% of people thought taking a 10-minute shower every day for a month had greater impact.

## Truth.

Throwing away 10 T-shirts per year<sup>xiii</sup> actually has greater impact than taking a 10-minute shower every day for a month<sup>xii</sup>.



People are largely unaware of the positive impact they can have on the world by simply taking the time to donate their clothing and household goods. When respondents were asked about which behaviors they associate with helping the environment, donating clothing ranked fourth, behind recycling cans, paper and bottles, using recyclable or reusable grocery bags and limiting water usage.

As people learn how their clothing purchases and disposal choices impact the environment, they are more likely to make more environmentally-friendly choices. 75 percent of participants agreed with the statement, “If I better understood how my actions hurt or helped the planet, I would be more likely to make environmentally conscious decisions.”

The outlook is positive—while more education is necessary, it’s a welcomed solution. Donating and purchasing used goods allows individuals to help their local communities while having a positive global impact. Instead of throwing away used clothing, people can donate items to benefit charities—providing much needed funding, while limiting the impact of clothing and textiles on the environment and, over time, reducing the demand for new products to ultimately save precious natural resources.

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### Luckily, those in the know are donating more, and plan to keep it up

- Respondents donated an average of 3.4 trash bags of clothing and accessories in 2016
- Respondents donated an average of 1.6 trash bags of household goods and appliances in 2016
- 33 percent say they donated more in 2016 than in 2015
- 17 percent say they will donate more in 2017 than in 2016



# What's Next?

The clothing industry puts an enormous demand on world resources during production, and due to a lack of understanding on the avenues for reuse, has become one of the world's largest sources of pollution<sup>xv</sup>. There are a variety of factors that often go unnoticed, including: the inordinate amount of water and pesticides required to grow cotton, carbon emissions from polyester and other textile manufacturing and a growing landfill issue caused by the millions of pounds of unwanted clothing being thrown away each year. The good news is that we can all play a part in curbing this problem and reducing the impact of clothing on our environment—all while giving back to our local communities.

In contrast to our habitual linear economy, in which we make, buy, use and dispose of products, moving toward a **circular economy** retains valuable natural resources every time we reuse or recycle manufactured goods like clothing and household items. Whether through our donations or our purchases, we can make a difference.

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## Helping the planet is a priority

- 63 percent believe children are interested in helping the planet.
- 78 percent say they want to help the planet because they should, not for attention.
- 51 percent say they are more likely to change their behavior to be more environmentally conscious to benefit the world at large.

Fortunately, there is market demand for used clothing and household goods. Eight in ten North Americans report having purchased used goods at some point in their life, with 65 percent having spent money on used clothing and household goods in 2016 alone. And thrifting is growing in popularity, with 51 percent of people saying the primary reason they thrift shop is to save money.

However, convenience remains a barrier for those who choose not to shop thrift: 32 percent say they don't have time to "dig through piles" for what they want, while 23 percent say it's not as convenient as buying new.

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## The impact of the 10 billion kilograms of cotton used in apparel in 2013 is equal to<sup>xvi</sup>:

- 25 coal-fired power plants burning for one year
- 13.4 million American homes' supply of electricity
- The carbon stored in one year in 88 million acres of forest (nearly the size of Japan)
- 1,300 round trips to the sun in a passenger car
- Emissions from all the passenger cars in New York

**55 percent think individuals should be responsible for ensuring their own clothing and household goods are disposed of properly.**

In terms of increasing donations, 96 percent of respondents say they travel 30 minutes or less to donate their used goods. Since non-donors say it's easier to throw items away rather than donate them (25 percent), and it's not as convenient to donate (18 percent), more should be done to make donating as simple as recycling

bottles and cans, perhaps with similarly recognizable bins. 57 percent of people support the use of clothing recycling bins in their city, and 48 percent would support special bags or bins in their homes with regular pickups. However, only 25 percent of respondents support these in-home bins being provided by the government.

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People need help getting rid of their *stuff*, and they are clearly open to doing things differently.

## Savers' Vision

Every item makes a difference. Instead of throwing away clothing that can be reused, we can donate them. Instead of buying ten brand-new shirts, we can enjoy the thrill of finding a unique item that others aren't wearing. By choosing a thrifted garment over a new one, we can reduce our own clothing footprint and, over time, help decrease the demand for new products and the natural resources that go into making them.

It is no longer enough to simply talk about the environmental impact of discarding unwanted goods; we must take action to make changes that have real, lasting impact. According to the U.S. EPA, current clothing and textile recycling patterns have a greater collective impact on reducing greenhouse gases than the recycling of yard waste, glass and plastic<sup>xvii</sup>.

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**It's time we all 'give a sh!rt™' about the environment and our communities. This year, Savers is challenging consumers to make a big difference—a BILLION POUND difference, to be exact. Join with Savers to help divert one billion pounds of textiles and household goods from landfills by donating your unwanted items to nonprofit organizations at a Savers store, rather than throwing them in the trash.**

<sup>i</sup> Generation up from 151.6 Million Tons in 1980 to 254.3 Million Tons in 2013. Source: Materials and Waste Management in the United States Key Facts and Figures. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2014. <https://www.epa.gov/smm/advancing-sustainable-materials-management-facts-and-figures#USState>

<sup>ii</sup> Hansen, Suzy. “How Zara Grew Into the World’s Largest Fashion Retailer.” The New York Times. November 9, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/magazine/how-zara-grew-into-the-worlds-largest-fashion-retailer.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/magazine/how-zara-grew-into-the-worlds-largest-fashion-retailer.html?_r=0).

<sup>iii</sup> Table 2.3.3. Real Personal Consumption Expenditures by Major Type of Product, Quantity Indexes. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Web. <https://www.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=9&step=1&acrdn=2#reqid=9&step=3&isuri=1&903=63>

<sup>iv</sup> “Donate Recycle Don’t Throw Away.” Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles. The Association of Wiping Materials, Used Clothing and Fiber Industries. Web. <http://www.smartasn.org/educators-kids/SMARTInfographTextileRecycling.pdf>.  
 “EPA Report Says Recycled Clothing And Textiles Have Significant Impact On Reducing Greenhouse Gasses.” Textile World. January 6, 2014. <http://www.textileworld.com/textile-world/textile-news/2014/01/epa-report-says-recycled-clothing-and-textiles-have-significant-impact-on-reducing-greenhouse-gasses/>

<sup>v</sup> “Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2013 Fact Sheet.” United States Environmental Protection Agency. June 2015. Web. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/2013\\_advncng\\_smm\\_fs.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/2013_advncng_smm_fs.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> “Donate Recycle Don’t Throw Away.” Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles. The Association of Wiping Materials, Used Clothing and Fiber Industries. Web. <http://www.smartasn.org/educators-kids/SMARTInfographTextileRecycling.pdf>.

<sup>vii</sup> The State of The Apparel Sector 2015 Special Report On Water.” The Sustainable Business Group. Web. [http://glaasaaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GLASA\\_2015\\_StateofApparelSector\\_SpecialReport\\_Water\\_150624.pdf](http://glaasaaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GLASA_2015_StateofApparelSector_SpecialReport_Water_150624.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> Lin, Albert C. “Virtual Consumption: A Second Life for Earth?” UC Davis Law. 2 August 2008. Web. <https://law.ucdavis.edu/faculty/lin/files/Virtual-Consumption.pdf>.

<sup>ix</sup> Sopinka, Heidi. “Here’s hoping you dig that polyester look.” The Globe and Mail. 18 May 2007. Web. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/heres-hoping-you-dig-that-polyester-look/article723222/>.

<sup>x</sup> Assuming 20 – 100 watt lights bulbs on for 8 hours.  
 100 watts x 20 bulbs = 2,000 watts/hour. 2000 watts/hours x 8 hours = 16,000watt\*h. 16,000 watt\*h = 16KW\*h.

<sup>xi</sup> “A Product Lifestyle Approach to Sustainability.” Levi Strauss & Co. March 2009. Web. <http://lisco.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/A-Product-Lifecycle-Approach-to-Sustainability.pdf>.

<sup>xii</sup> Average American shower uses 2.1 gallons/minute.  
 2.1 gallons x 10 minutes = 21 gallons.  
 21 gallons x 30 (days in a month) = 630 gallons.

<sup>xiii</sup> “The State of The Apparel Sector 2015 Special Report On Water.” The Sustainable Business Group. Web. [http://glaasaaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GLASA\\_2015\\_StateofApparelSector\\_SpecialReport\\_Water\\_150624.pdf](http://glaasaaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GLASA_2015_StateofApparelSector_SpecialReport_Water_150624.pdf).



<sup>xiv</sup> Table 2.3.3. Real Personal Consumption Expenditures by Major Type of Product, Quantity Indexes. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Web. <https://www.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=9&step=1&acrdn=2#reqid=9&step=3&isuri=1&903=63> MSW Generation up from 151.6 Million Tons in 1980 to 254.3 Million Tons in 2013. Source: The United States EPA, <https://www.epa.gov/smm/advancing-sustainable-materials-management-facts-and-figures#USState>

<sup>xv</sup> Kirchain, Randolph, Elsa Olivetti, Reed Miller and Suzanne Greene. “Sustainable Apparel Materials.” Materials Systems Laboratory. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 7 October 2015. Web. <http://msl.mit.edu/publications/SustainableApparelMaterials.pdf>.

<sup>xvi</sup> “Municipal Solid Waste Generation, Recycling, and Disposal in the United States: Facts and Figures for 2012.” United States Environmental Protection Agency. February 2014. Web. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/2012\\_msw\\_fs.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/2012_msw_fs.pdf).

## About Savers

The Savers family of thrift stores, operating under the Savers, Value Village, Unique, and Village des Valeurs brands, is a purpose-driven thrift retailer offering quality used clothing and household goods at our more than 320 stores in the U.S., Canada and Australia. We got our start more than 60 years ago from a commitment to reuse and supporting local communities. We purchase used clothing, household goods and textiles from nonprofit charitable organizations to extend the life of used goods and reduce what ends up in the landfill. Over the past 10 years, Savers has paid its collective nonprofit partners more than **\$1.5 billion** for donated clothing and household goods—money that helps fund their missions.

In the last year alone, we have helped divert more than 700 million pounds of material from landfills. In 2016, our stores repurposed hundreds of millions of items, including 224 million tops, 31 million shoes, 74 million pairs of pants, 19 million coats, 26 million dresses, 19 million bags, purses and wallets and 7 million pieces of jewelry.

At Savers, reuse is our reason for being: it’s what we do. When we can’t find a new purpose for any given donation we’ve purchased from our nonprofit partners, we find a way to recycle and/or properly dispose of it. Though the vast majority of the goods we process are reused in their original form, we’ve dedicated an entire division of our company to recycling. Textiles can be repurposed as insulation, and metals from clothing and electronics can be sold for their raw, recyclable components. It is our goal to realize the potential in every item we receive.

To learn more about Savers’ commitment to reuse and local communities, visit [rethinkreuse.com](http://rethinkreuse.com) or [savers.com/rethinkreuse](http://savers.com/rethinkreuse).

