



Buy Better, Waste Nothing

What are the problems?

We live in a society where it has become the norm to buy whatever latest gadget is advertised to us, use it for a short time and then throw it away and get a new one. Not only does this attitude result in huge amounts of waste that need to be disposed of, it creates avoidable carbon emissions in whichever country manufactures a product, and depletes the world's resources through mining and other extractive industries. As the graph shows, nearly half of the carbon dioxide emissions for which we are responsible are "outsourced" to other countries (eg China) because they make the products we buy.

Global food supply accounts for up to 30% of carbon emissions, yet households in the UK waste over 7 million tons of food every year.

Plastic pollution is now so bad that microplastics have been found in Antarctica, in most marine species and even in human blood.

Greenhouse gas emissions associated with UK consumption
(million tonnes Co2 equivalent)



What can we do to help?

- Hire goods (especially tools, cars, sports equipment and clothes) rather than buy them
- Buy second-hand whenever possible
- Check how durable goods are and whether they can be repaired. If something breaks get the manufacturer to repair it or take it to a Repair Cafe
- Find out where goods are made. If they are made abroad think about the carbon emissions involved in delivering the product by ship or plane
- Consider how easy a product would be to reuse or recycle
- Try to keep electronic products (like phones and tablets) for at least 7 years
- Try to limit yourself to 3 new items of clothing per year
- Reduce, reuse and recycle whenever possible
- Aim to cut down on food waste and avoid plastic as much as possible

What do you think?

- Is it fair to condemn China for its high carbon emissions when they are producing goods for the rest of the world?
- How can we break the habit of buying new stuff all the time?
- What's the best way to keep food fresh without using plastic packaging?

What else can be done?

All of us – consumers, manufacturers, distributors and governments – can try to move towards a “Circular Economy”. This is where we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of use. A circular economy is vital as it reduces waste, maximises what we get out of our resources, helps reduce the environmental impacts of production and consumption, and contributes to a more competitive economy.



Manufacturers can work together towards “Industrial Symbiosis” where the byproducts from one process become the raw materials for a different manufacturer. Government could help organize this, and it could pass stronger “right to repair” laws and limit the use of plastics. Local councils could also help by providing opportunities for businesses which use similar materials to be located close to each other.

They could do more to promote the idea of the circular economy and embrace it within their own local plans. Councils and government are more likely to make these changes if we let them know that’s what we want from them.

Keywords for further research

Circular Economy; Weymouth Repair Café; WeyShare at The Circular Shop; SW Coast Refills; Community Fridge; Slow Fashion; Litter Free Dorset; Ellen Macarthur Foundation; Ethical Consumer; bioplastics; Consumption Emissions; Right to Repair; Take The Jump; WRAP; Fast Fashion