

## **Moving the Needle Seminar #18:**

# **Rivers as Pathways: Addressing Textile Waste in Rivers**

April 17, 2024

Rivers around the world are being polluted by discarded textiles, chemical wastewater and microplastics, posing threats to aquatic life and ecosystems. Tackling this issue is crucial for safeguarding our waterways, promoting sustainable manufacturing practices, and ensuring a cleaner, healthier planet for future generations. We delve into the pressing issue of river waste in the textile industry, emphasizing its environmental impact and the creative ways action is being taken.

## **Summary**

Textile waste has emerged as a significant contributor to river pollution, with 80% of pollution entering the oceans via rivers and waterways. Fashion is responsible for up to one-fifth of industrial water pollution, due in part to weak regulation and enforcement in producer countries, where rivers are commonly used as a dumping ground for chemical wastewater and textiles. As water challenges grow around the world due to fast fashion's ongoing pressures, the industry faces a variety of water-related risks from a micro to a macro level. So, what are these risks and how can the industry work to address them?

During this webinar, we dove into the environmental consequences of textile pollution, the harmful effects of chemical wastewater, and meeting the people who are helping clean our rivers from textile waste. We explore innovative approaches to tackling this challenge, emphasizing the importance of waste management and redefining the end-of-life journey for textiles through creativity and fashion design. Our speakers discuss the devastating impact of textile dumping on river ecosystems and introduce groundbreaking AI technology aimed at cleaning our rivers. This webinar shed light on the importance of slowing down our fast fashion consumption and holding ourselves accountable for responsible waste practices.



### **Tejas Edvankar,**

Technical Manager, ZDHC Foundation

Tejas provides an in-depth overview of the Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC) initiative, particularly focusing on water stewardship. He traces the origins of ZDHC, established in 2012 as a multi-brand initiative, that aimed to initiate a joint

roadmap to address the water challenges through collaborative efforts among brands, chemical industry stakeholders, and manufacturers. The initiative emphasizes sustainable chemical management, resource efficiency, and circularity to protect life, land, air, and water. Key components include the Manufacturing Restricted Substance List (MRSL) the backbone and framework of the program, and the Competence Center, comprising subject matter experts, playing a crucial role in developing guidelines, conducting research, and fostering innovation to embed sustainable practices across the industry. Collaboration with organizations like Textile Exchange, SAC, Leather Working Group, Apparel Impact Institute, and Ellen MacArthur Foundation further enhances ZDHC's impact in promoting environmental sustainability and chemical management in the global value chain.

Takeaways:

- The emphasis is made on ZDHC's holistic approach to chemical management by believing that a clean input creates a clean output through a set of combined and continuous actions for improvement in the wet processing areas, with special regard to the textile, leather, and footwear industries.
- Tejas explains that transparency and collaboration are key to ZDHC's success in creating change in the value chain, with the importance of stakeholders following the program's holistic mentality.
- Tejas elaborates on the ongoing and upcoming projects of the Water Competence Center, which encompass various initiatives including updating wastewater guidelines, developing sludge testing pathways, creating a microfiber shedding indicator, and more.



### **Jacqueline Plaster,**

Regional Manager Southeast Asia, everwave GmbH

Jacqueline highlights Everwave's efforts in river waste management, particularly focusing on long-term cleanup projects in Southeast Asia and the Balkan region. Everwave's employment of specialized garbage collection boats equipped with conveyor belts to extract waste from rivers efficiently, complemented by shoreline cleanups. In addition to physical cleanup, they leverage artificial intelligence to categorize collected materials for deeper understanding and sustainable long-term solutions. Jacqueline emphasizes collaborative partnerships with governments, NGOs, and companies to address waste infrastructure gaps and promote environmental stewardship. Notably, their project in Cambodia has made significant strides, collecting over 1.1 million kilos of waste and employing 18 local team members. Through

transparency and extensive data tracking, they measure their impact and engage stakeholders to drive positive change in waste management practices.

Takeaways:

- Jacqueline underscores the critical role of data tracking in understanding the full impact of waste on rivers, emphasizing the need for quantifiable data. The integration of AI creates a clearer assessment of the environmental impact of waste in rivers, supporting informed decision-making and targeted interventions.
- Jacqueline stresses the importance of collaboration, highlighting the opportunity to establish business partnerships that yield plastic credits. Under this approach, for every euro invested, one kilogram of waste can be removed from water bodies.
- Everwave's vision to promote positive change and visible impact, not only by collecting waste but also through partnerships and AI-driven data to track and mitigate future waste from polluting the rivers is key to their mission and success.



### **Jamie Raine,**

Director of Business Development, REMADE IN CAMBODIA

In the presentation by Jaime, the focus is on finding the medium between sustainability and creativity. Jaime elaborates on their initiative, Remade in Cambodia, which transforms river waste into fashion through a collaborative effort with Everwave. By leveraging collected textiles from Cambodian rivers and secondhand clothing, they provide a platform for local Cambodian youth designers to showcase their talent on a global scale. The process involves meticulous washing and sorting of textiles, a challenging yet essential step in their mission to promote textile and environmental sustainability in a trendy and engaging manner. Through fashion events and upcycled collections, they aim to change perceptions about recycled fashion and empower Cambodian artisans, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and inclusive fashion ecosystem. Their innovative approach bridges the gap between environmental conservation and creative expression, highlighting the untapped potential of Cambodian fashion on an international stage.

### **Takeaways:**

- Jaime aims to challenge the common perception that Khmer fashion is exclusively traditional and artisanal by showcasing contemporary designs that resonate with the cultural context of today. Remade seeks to redefine Khmer fashion by integrating modern elements while honoring and reflecting the richness of Cambodian heritage in a way that is relevant and relatable to contemporary audiences.

- Through Everwave's Zero Waste Center, the Remade designers are able to collect the textiles and learn about fiber compositions to be able to create product lines for their designs. They elaborate on the current struggles in textile processing, such as improving filtration systems and manually sorting usable waste, to facilitate more efficient and sustainable practices in recycling materials.
- Remade's vision is to challenge the perception that recycled fashion is merely beneficial for the environment, instead promoting it as high-quality fashion suitable for retail, even in the luxury sector. Their goal is to elevate recycled fashion to a status where it is not only seen as a positive contribution to the country but also as a desirable and prestigious product within the fashion industry.

To learn more, watch the [recording of the Seminar](#). The slides presented in this seminar are attached below. For more online seminars on similar topics, check out the [Asian Dialogues Series](#).

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