



Environmental

Impact of Masks on Textile Wastes

Chairs:

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Dear Delegates,

We, Rayan Bellahsni (rayan.bellahsni@ast.ma) and Amira Elmissouab (ElmissouabAmira@gmail.com), are pleased to welcome you to the eighth Tangier Model UN conference. During the upcoming conference, the Environmental Committee will be entertaining the topic of the Impact of Masks on Textile Wastes. The following document informs you on the background information necessary to participate in the committee.

Topic Introduction

With the rise of the pandemic, masks have become essential for survival and mandatory in most parts of our society. The usage of masks has been encouraged by governments, corporations and organizations, however, there has been a lack of guidance in regards to disposing the material. Face coverings have become a massive litter problem in our oceans and lands, and with countries lifting lockdown restrictions, the usage of masks are only going to continue to skyrocket. The environmental committee must find a solution for better disposal options in order to prevent massive environmental disaster.

Most surgical face masks are produced from plastic materials such as polypropylene which is placed between non-woven fabric. Polypropylene requires about 20 to 30 years to decompose while other forms of plastic take up to hundreds of years. In marine terms, overtime plastic is broken down into microplastics and then smaller nanoplastics. If these nanoplastics are consumed by marine animals, they can be poisoned. These nanoplastic particles can carry chemicals and bacteria by rising in the food chain and eventually being consumed by humans. This indicates that masks have a long-lasting effect on the environment, especially considering the fact that most countries will need billions of masks monthly after restrictions are lowered and the vaccine is slowly being distributed to essential workers and the elders first.

Furthermore, abandoned masks form a risk of spreading the virus to waste collectors or people who come across the litter first. According to *The Lancet* medical journal, in some instances, the virus can exist on a plastic surgical mask for up to seven days, therefore creating a hazard to the people who have to clean up after others.

Due to the abundance of masks in the oceans, marine animals and plants have become affected by the smothering plastic sheets that invade their water. Some animals mistake the masks for their prey, and this causes them to either choke to death on the material or result in their malnourishment. Laurent Lombard of the French non-profit Operation Mer Propre said “Soon we’ll run the risk of having more masks than jellyfish in the Mediterranean.”

Although the United Nations recognizes the issue placed by face masks on textile waste, it has not given a thorough solution as of yet. This committee hopes to tackle the issue by creating a resolution that successfully targets each conflict in the topic.

Question to Consider

- How has the mask industry given rise to textile waste?
- What can be done about the disposal of used masks to prevent them from becoming waste?
- What is the delegate’s country’s position on textile waste?
- What are some changes that can be made to make masks more durable?
- How can textile waste be damaging towards the environment?
- What are viable resolutions for an exponential decrease in textile waste?

Key Words

- **Environment**: the natural world, as a whole or in a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activity.
- **Textile**: a type of cloth or woven fabric
- **Textile Recycling**: the process by which old clothing and other textiles are recovered for reuse or material recovery
- **Waste Management**: the activities and actions required to manage waste from its inception to its disposal

UN Involvement

- In June 2020, the United Nations work alongside “WHO” to assure safety for those wearing masks and the environment. In doing so, the United Nations brought upon the manufacture of reusable masks that reduce costs and waste and contribute to sustainability.
- In July 2020, the official website for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) uploaded an article discussing the effects of trade on Covid-19 pollution. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, the executive director of the International Trade Centre (ITC), stated that “The important role that global trade policies could play in the fight against plastic pollution has not garnered the attention it deserves...But the way countries have been using trade policy to fight plastic pollution has mostly been uncoordinated, which limits the effectiveness of their efforts.”

Requirements

- A considerable amount of knowledge on the topic
- Position Papers
- Resolution Paper
- Due dates must be respected

Bibliography

- [Coronavirus face masks: an environmental disaster that might last generations](#)
- [Stability of SARS-CoV-2 in different environmental conditions](#)
- [Coronavirus waste ends up in ocean](#)
- [Covid-19 face masks: A potential source of microplastic fibers in the environment](#)
- [Growing plastic pollution in wake of COVID-19: how trade policy can help](#)