

TAMP ACTION

The Tampaction Campaign is a national, youth led effort to replace unhealthy, unsustainable tampons and pads with sustainable alternatives and positive attitudes towards menstruation, menstruators' bodies, and the environment.



Human Health: Despite the efforts of tampon companies to present sanitized, attractive packages, menstrual products contain many hidden health issues. First, commercial tampons contain trace amounts of dioxin, a toxic chemical (studies have linked dioxins with cancer, endometriosis, and other ailments). Next, all major tampon brands contain rayon, a super-absorbent and abrasive material that causes ulceration and peeling of the mucous membrane – it absorbs more than it is supposed to. Finally, Toxic Shock Syndrome, a serious and often fatal affliction (which is now rare thanks to pressure placed on tampon corporations), has been directly linked to the use of commercial tampons. <Information from: bloodsisters.org and the "Stop the Whitewash" Campaign>

“In California, it has become illegal to feed the leaves, stems, and short fibers of cotton known as *gin trash* to livestock, because of the concentrated levels of pesticide residue. Instead, this *gin trash* is used to make furniture, mattresses, tampons, swabs, and cotton balls.”
-seac.org/tampons/environment

‘Natural’ Environment: The use of commercial tampon products contributes to an unnecessary stream of consumption and waste. The average menstruator consumes between 10,000 and 16,000 pads and tampons in a lifetime (250-300 pounds), in addition to accompanying packaging and plastic applicators. Commercial chlorine bleaching processes utilize sodium chlorate (an herbicide) and sodium chlorite (which releases toxic gas), which is particularly shameful because the process is entirely unnecessary to begin with (why must menstrual products be whiter than white??). Next, tampons are produced largely from non-organic cotton, which is a high insecticide crop. Five of the most common insecticides used for non-organic cotton in the U.S. are known carcinogens. Finally, we must remember that this is also an issue of environmental justice, since factories, incinerators, landfills, etc. used in this process are disproportionately located in minority communities, thus impacting them more. <Information from seac.org/tampons and dchem.co.kr>

- “Over 12 billion pads and 7 billion tampons are used once and disposed of annually, clogging our overburdened landfill sites.” -National Women's Health Network
- “Disposable tampons and pads, from the first steps of their manufacture to their bitter end in a landfill, washed up on a beach, or burning in an incinerator, have a direct effect on people, generally people of color and low income communities.”
-seac.org/tampons/environmentaljustice

Taboo/Oppression/Solutions: The personal is political. This is a mantra of feminism and feminist theory; we cannot remove the everyday from the fantastic, the macro from the micro, the personal from the political. Popular culture in the United States is not “neutral” – it has problematic ideas about menstruation, at best. Menstruators (and women in general) are often made to feel dirty, ashamed, and guilty because of deep taboos about sexuality, menstruation and bleeding. The point of this campaign is to help menstruators and their allies learn to recognize and reconsider complicated systems of domination like sexism, make connections with other things like environmental justice, and to begin to support positive, sustainable alternatives. Tampons are merely one concrete aspect of a much larger scheme, but they are a good place to start.

"Environmentalism is essentially human rights, civil rights, women's rights, indigenous rights, sexual orientation rights and labor rights. These rights are all interconnected and damage to one is damage to all."
-Environmental Justice Strategy Paper Latin America Solidarity Coalition

to get more info, help out, complain, or just talk, contact the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC) 215.222.4711 seac at seac.org | or matt/ie reitman 315.450.6628 matt at energyjustice.net



THE ALTERNATIVES

So which alternatives should you use? Well, it's of course completely up to you and what you're comfortable with, but below are the alternatives Tampaction endorses. All of the other alternatives to conventional tampons pose health and environmental risks that we feel are not worth taking. Visit our website at www.seac.org/tampons for more info about these and other menstrual products.

ORGANIC COTTON, NON-CHLORINE BLEACHED TAMPONS

What they are: They're tampons. You can buy them with or without applicators just like the conventional tampons.

What they're made of: 100% organic cotton, and that's all. It is not bleached with any form of chlorine, so the bleaching process cannot add any toxins to the tampon. It has no rayon in it. The cotton it was made from was grown without pesticides or herbicides.

Who's making money off them: Natracare conducts independent research on behalf of menstruators because mainstream corporations won't. The staff of Organic Essentials is almost entirely women, mostly white Christian Texans and led by farmers. Check them out yourself at: www.OrganicEssentials.com/employees.htm.

Good Aspects

- Not laden with pesticides
- No chlorine bleaching
- No rayon
- You cut them to the size that is right for you
- Easy to use
- Extremely comfortable

Bad Aspects

- There is a chance of TSS
- Disposable and wasteful
- 1.5 to 2 times more expensive than mainstream tampons
- Absorbs vaginal mucus and alters pH, which can cause yeast infections
- Clogs up septic systems
- You can't use your menstrual blood for art and plant fertilizer
- Not sterile

Where to get them: At natural food stores or online at:

Organic Essentials: www.OrganicEssentials.com/

Natracare: www.natracare.com/

REUSABLE CLOTH PADS

What it is: A cloth, reusable menstrual pad. This includes any rag-like cloth. Can be carefully sewn pads from a pattern perfected over year, or ripped-up old pajamas.

What it's made of: Cotton. Soft comfy flannel, deep luxurious terry cloth, made lovingly in factories, in bedrooms and at Stitch 'n' Bitches - by hand, on industrial sewing machines or on your grandmother's 1971 ElnaSuper. Of course, it varies depending on whether you make or buy them, and then on who you buy them from.

Who's making money off it: Maybe you. Shira [Below the Belt] makes cloth pads and sells them; so do Many Moons, GladRags, Urban Armor, Menarchy, LunaPads, Pandora Pads; Shira's friends Kristin, Sharon, and Erin; Shira's friend's girlfriend Annie; and lots of other folks.



THE KEEPER AND DIVACUP

What it is: It is a cup worn internally, holding (instead of absorbing) monthly menstrual flow. It can be worn up to 12 hours, and even overnight. Lasts for at least 10 years.

What it's made of: The Keeper is made of natural gum rubber, tapped from trees without killing them.

Who's making money off it: "Made and distributed by women, for women."

Cost: \$35 (under \$.29/month). If you spend \$35 on the Keeper, and usually spend \$5/cycle on other products, in ten years you save \$615.00

Good Aspects

- Collect blood, don't absorb it
- Environmentally friendly
- You can use your menstrual blood for plant fertilizer and art
- No chlorine bleaching
- Last for 10 years
- Affordable, plus a 3 month money back guarantee
- Comfortable - you can't really feel them, much like a tampon
- Great for traveling (nothing to carry around)
- Fun to empty in public restroom

Where to get them:

SEAC: seac.org/tampons

Keeper: TheKeeper.com

DivaCup: DivaCup.com

Bad Aspects

- Slight chance of TSS, though no cases have been found
- May aggravate urinary tract infections
- A few menstruators find they increase risk of yeast infections
- Can be messy to change
- The suction effect is initially disconcerting
- Only comes in 2 sizes, so it might not fit you perfectly
- Takes a few tries to learn how to insert and remove it properly
- A full bladder can knock it out of place and make it leak
- If you're allergic to latex you should not use the Keeper!

Good Aspects:

- They let your blood flow naturally, as it was meant to
- You're making something for yourself that you can be proud of and get excited about every month (or however often you menstruate)
- You can use your menstrual blood for plant fertilizer and art
- You can make them yourself out of old clothes and towels - the nostalgic and creative possibilities are endless!
- Affordable
- Soft and comfy (not like disposables)
- Reusable, hence better for the environment
- No risk of Toxic Shock
- No chlorine bleaching

Bad Aspects:

- You have to be willing to wash them
- Not so convenient if you're out for long periods of time. You may have to carry them home in a plastic bag
- Depending on pad, they can be bulky
- If you just wash them by hand, they get pretty hard and crunchy, so a washing machine is needed

Where to get them:

www.seac.org/tampons/ for patterns to make your own and info on all the other places to order pads