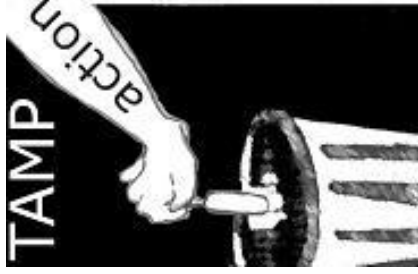


THE TRUTH ABOUT TAMPONS:

WHAT YOUR MOTHER NEVER TOLD YOU



Brought to you by *Tampaction*, a campaign organized by the National Student Environmental Action Coalition [SEAC]

Mission Statement:

The Tampaction Campaign aims to eradicate the use of unhealthy, unsustainable tampons and pads, institutionalize sustainable alternatives into our schools and communities, and infuse healthy attitudes surrounding menstruation into our culture's consciousness.

We're letting the world know that bleedin' can be everyone's issue. In doing so, we work to destroy patriarchal taboos, end environmental degradation caused by disposable tampons and pads, and promote vaginal and menstrual health.

Curious.

What are these people talking about?

Broadly, there is concern about the mainstream menstrual industry's involvement in issues of:

1) Human Health

2) Society

3) The Natural Environment

4) (Environmental) Justice

This is important stuff and it doesn't have to be scary, but there are some things here folks ought to know about...

Human Health

Dioxin

- *Dioxin is a serious poison.* Its toxic effect are cumulative and can only be measured/noticed after years of exposure. EPA says: “no safe dose”
- According to manufacturers, tampons and pads contain dioxins “at or below” acceptable levels, but this lies in direct contradiction to other assertions
- There is not and has never been any independent (non-corporate) testing of dioxin levels in menstrual products, and the tests that have been done have been inappropriate (the vagina is the most absorbent part of the body, which the testing doesn’t take into account)
- Concerns about dioxin are not nearly as great as they used to be, in part because of pressure generated by campaigns like this one

Human Health (cont.)

Rayon and other synthetics

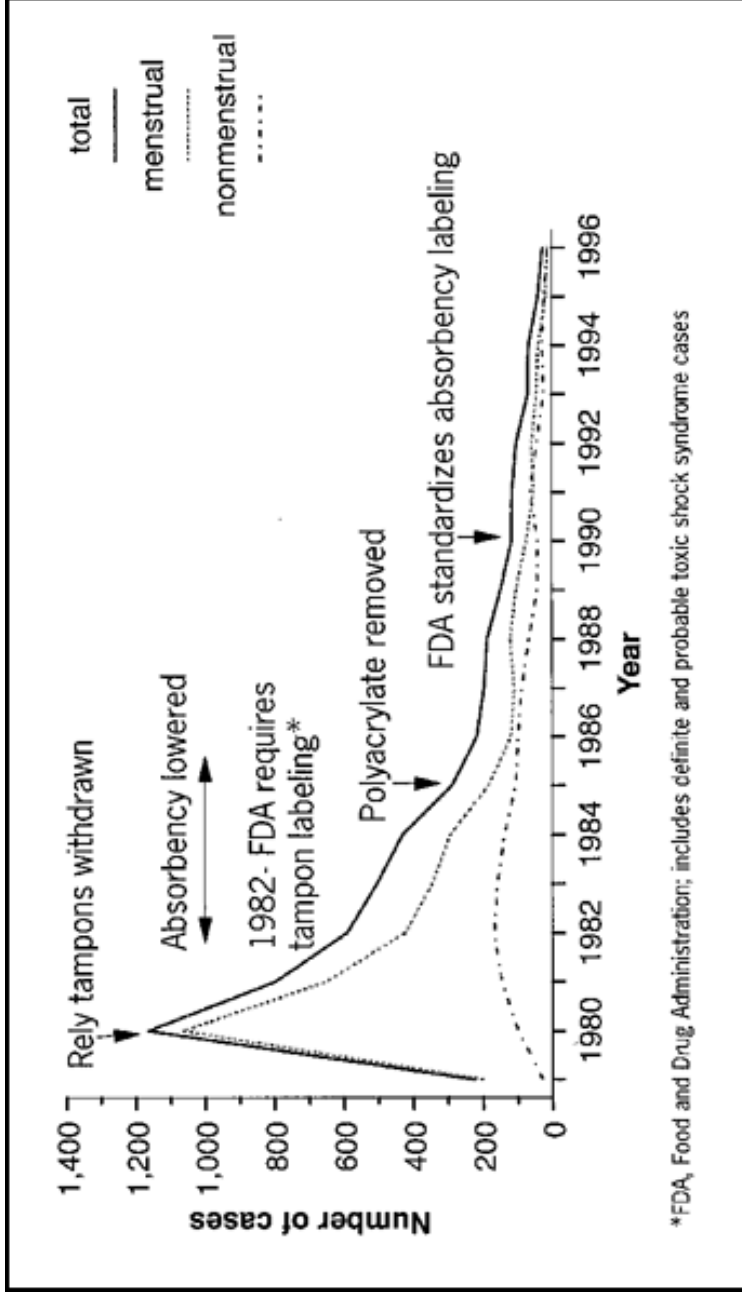
- Rayon is a super-absorbent synthetic (plastic) material in most mainstream menstrual products
- Rayon and other synthetics have been criticized for being *too* absorbent: rayon causes “ulceration and peeling of the mucous membrane” in the vagina
- Because of their super-absorbency, synthetic materials in tampons are more likely to remain inside the vagina after removal, increasing several health concerns
- There is an incentive in this absorbency, because increased bleeding means increased profits
- Synthetics led to the rise of tampon-related Toxic Shock Syndrome cases (beginning in the late 1970s/early 1980s)
- The FDA has refused to require ingredient listings on menstrual products

Human Health (cont.)

Toxic Shock Syndrome

- TSS is a serious medical emergency, caused by a bacterial infection of staphylococcus (naturally present in about 20% of menstruator's vaginas at any given time) in the blood stream
- TSS has been directly linked to mainstream menstrual products, specifically non-organic, synthetic tampons

• TSS is no longer a major concern, thanks in part to pressure generated by campaigns like this one (but it should still be taken seriously!)



Society (“Whiter than White”)

Why is it taboo to talk about these things? Why haven't you seen this information before? Where did you learn about menstruation and menstrual products? Etc. Etc. The answers to these questions are all very socially influenced – perhaps some of these words can help provide answers, and provoke more questions:

“The way we menstruate in America today not only affects the economy, it also contributes to the way in which adolescent girls make the body into an intense project requiring careful scrutiny and constant personal control” (Brumberg, The Body Project p. 30).

“Girls who grow up in the modern world of sanitary protection learn early how to keep a menstruating body under control...[it] has become more of an economic ritual than a social one” (Brumberg 32).

“The point was to use ‘our’ product because ‘nothing will show’; ‘no one will know’; ‘your secret will be safe.’ We were meant to deodorize, sanitize, remove any evidence, and hide all shame” (Merskin, *What Every Girl Should Know* p. 121).

Society (cont.)

“Modern advertisements for feminine hygiene products are compilations of centuries-old myths and taboos...today’s advertisements perpetuate menstrual myths and dictate appropriate behavior around tales from the past” (Merskin, p. 114).

“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).

“Most women do not have any measurable differences in their thinking capacity throughout their cycles or in their ability to perform tasks...Men, however, who are much more prone to seriously incapacitating and unpredictable diseases, such as heart problems, continue in highly responsible positions” (Boston Women’s Health Collective, The New Our Bodies, Ourselves p. 212).

The Natural Environment

Stream of consumption and waste

- As many as 16,800 pads and tampons in a menstruator's lifetime
- 12 billion pads and 7 billion tampons per year in the U.S. alone

A dirty industry

- cotton – 5 known carcinogens and 25% of all pesticides in the U.S. are used to grow cotton
- rayon – made from cellulose from the wood pulp industry, the country's third largest polluter
- unnecessary bleaching process further poisons the environment (why must menstrual products be so white anyway??)

to give you an idea:

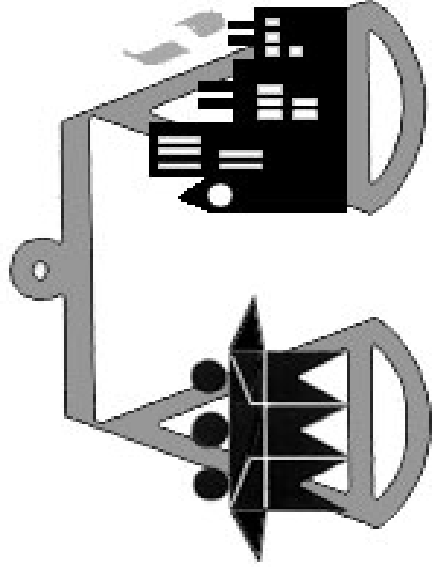
12 billion pads + 7 billion tampons = about
383 million pounds/year!

or about 81,500 Hummer H3s →



(Environmental) Justice

This must all be put into context of the world we live in today. Because of the unequal distribution of wealth and thus also environmental impact, some people get hurt more by all of this, including social, health, and environmental issues.



It is also worth considering whether sex and gender have played a part in the history of the menstrual industry – for instance, would the legislation introduced in 1997 to require independent testing have been rejected if everyone menstruated? How else may sex and gender be important here?

"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-

There is another way...

There are several healthy, safe alternatives:

- 1) The Keeper and the DivaCup
- 2) Reusable pads
- 3) Organic pads and tampons
- 4) Sea sponges

Menstrual cups:

The Keeper

What they are:

They are cups worn internally, holding (instead of absorbing) monthly menstrual flow. They can be worn up to 12 hours, and even overnight.

How they work:

To insert, you first fold the cup lengthwise between your fingers. It forms a seal which keeps fluid inside the cup. It will not absorb or disrupt your natural vaginal moisture. It can hold up to one ounce of menstrual flow, (an average menstruator's monthly flow is about 2-4 ounces). To remove it you simply pinch the bottom of the cup to release the seal, then bear down slightly with your pelvic muscles to help move it downward. Remove slowly, and empty the contents into the toilet. Rinse or wipe, and reinsert. Between cycles you should rinse sufficiently with water and soap or a mild vinegar solution, but avoid harsh chemicals – the DivaCup can be boiled.

What they're made of:

Keeper - natural gum rubber, tapped from trees without killing them
DivaCup – high quality 100% hypo-allergenic soft medical grade silicone

Where to get them:

keeper.com, divacup.com, natural food stores, and many others



Menstrual cups:

The Keeper



Good Aspects

- They collect blood - do not absorb blood or cause abrasions
- Reusable = friendly to the environment
- No bleaching process necessary
- Last for 10 years
- Affordable
- Money-back guarantee
- Extremely comfortable
- Great for traveling (nothing to carry around)
- The DivaCup is good for those with latex allergies

and the DivaCup



Bad Aspects

- There is a *slight* chance of TSS, although no cases have been reported
- May aggravate urinary tract infections
- Can be messy to change
- Suction effect is initially disconcerting
- Only come in 2 sizes, so might not fit perfectly
- Higher initial investment
- Takes a few tries to learn how to insert and remove properly
- Keeper is made of latex (rubber=latex)

Reusable Pads

What they are:

Cloth, reusable menstrual pads. This includes any rag-like cloth you stick in your underwear to soak up your flow. It can include carefully-sewn pads made from a pattern that took years to perfect, or it can be ripped-up old pajamas.

What they are made of:

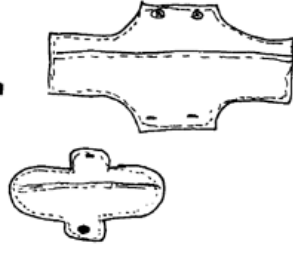
Cotton, soft comfy flannel, deep luxurious terry cloth, made lovingly in factories, in bedrooms and at stitch 'n' bitches, by hand, on industrial sewing machines...Of course, it varies depending on whether you make them yourself or buy them, and then it depends on who you buy them from.

Where to get them:

yourself or your friends, urban-armor.org, gladrags.com, lunapads.com, pandorapads.com, and others



reusable pads



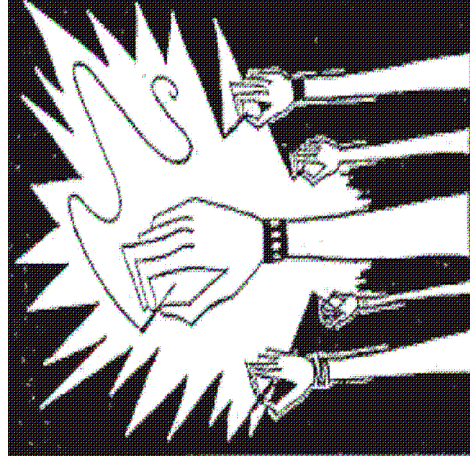
Reusable Pads

Good Aspects

- They let blood flow naturally
- You can make something for yourself that you can be proud of an get excited about every time you menstruate
- Old clothes and towels make great pads – the creative and nostalgic possibilities are endless!
- Affordable
- Soft and comfy
- Reusable, hence better for the environment
- No risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome
- No chlorine bleaching necessary

Bad Aspects

- Have to set aside time 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, can be bulky
- If you just wash them by hand, they can get pretty hard and crunchy, so a washing machine is needed
- Higher initial investment



Organic Pads and Tampons

What they are:

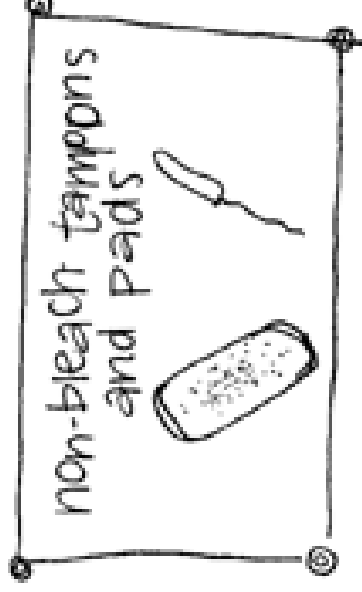
They're pads and tampons, just like conventional ones except made from organic cotton - tampons are available with or without applicators. Organic simply means that the ingredients are made without the use of synthetic inputs, such as fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms.

What they are made of:

Pads – non-chlorine bleached, organic cotton with plastic lining
Tampons – 100% organic, non-chlorine bleached cotton

Where to get them:

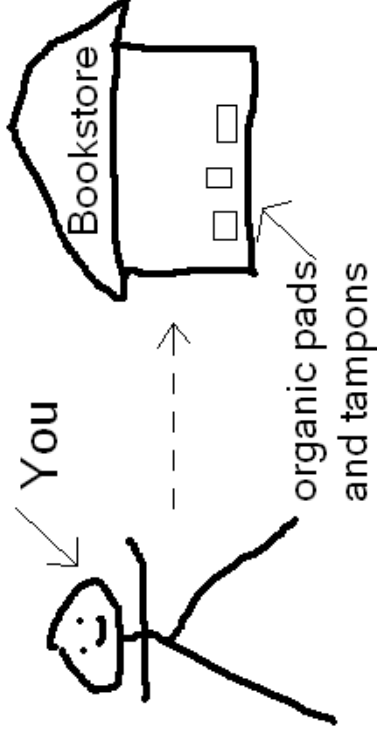
Most natural food stores, organiceentials.com, natracare.com, and your very own SU Bookstore



Organic Pads and Tampons

Good Aspects

- Pesticide-free
- No chlorine bleaching
- No rayon
- If desired, you can cut them to the size that is right for you
- Easy to use and often familiar
- Very comfortable
- No perfumes
- No risk of dioxin exposure
- Available at the SU Bookstore



Bad Aspects

- As with any tampon, there is a chance of Toxic Shock Syndrome, though no cases have ever been reported
 - Disposable and wasteful
 - Often more expensive than mainstream pads and tampons
- As with any tampon, vaginal mucus is absorbed, thus altering pH balance, which can lead to yeast infections.
- Can clog septic systems
 - Not sterile
 - Can be difficult to find

Sea Sponges

What they are:

Sea sponges are another reusable menstrual protection option from the past. They are plant-like creatures growing in colonies on the ocean floor. There are over forty five hundred varieties, the softest of which are the Atlantic and Mediterranean Silks. As sponges are harvested, millions of egg and sperm cells are released into the surrounding water, making the sponge a renewable resource. However, we cannot, at this point, guarantee that the harvesting techniques leave a small overall ecological footprint. Sponges are also questionable for strict vegans.

How it Works:

Simply wash out and reinsert every 4-6 hours, as often as you would change a tampon. Clean by simply soaking in vinegar overnight; air dry. Tie or sew on a piece of cotton string for easy retrieval. They can be used for several cycles each, then they begin to disintegrate.

Where to get them:

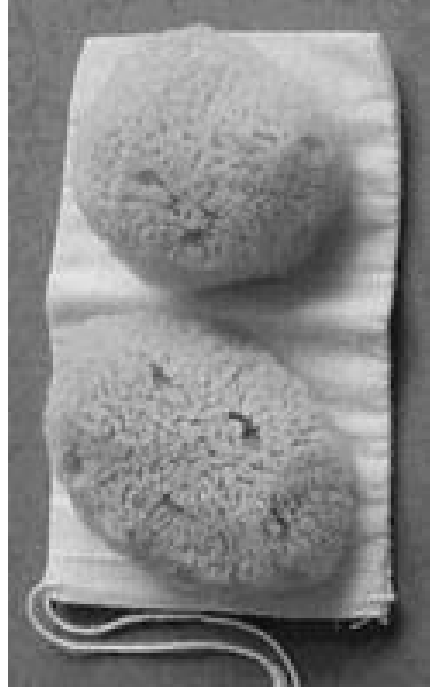
Natural food stores, jadeandpearl.com, urban-armor.org, lunapads.com

Note: Tampaction does not fully endorse sea sponges because of their questionable effects on menstrual health, the environment, and living sea sponges.

Sea Sponges

Good Aspects

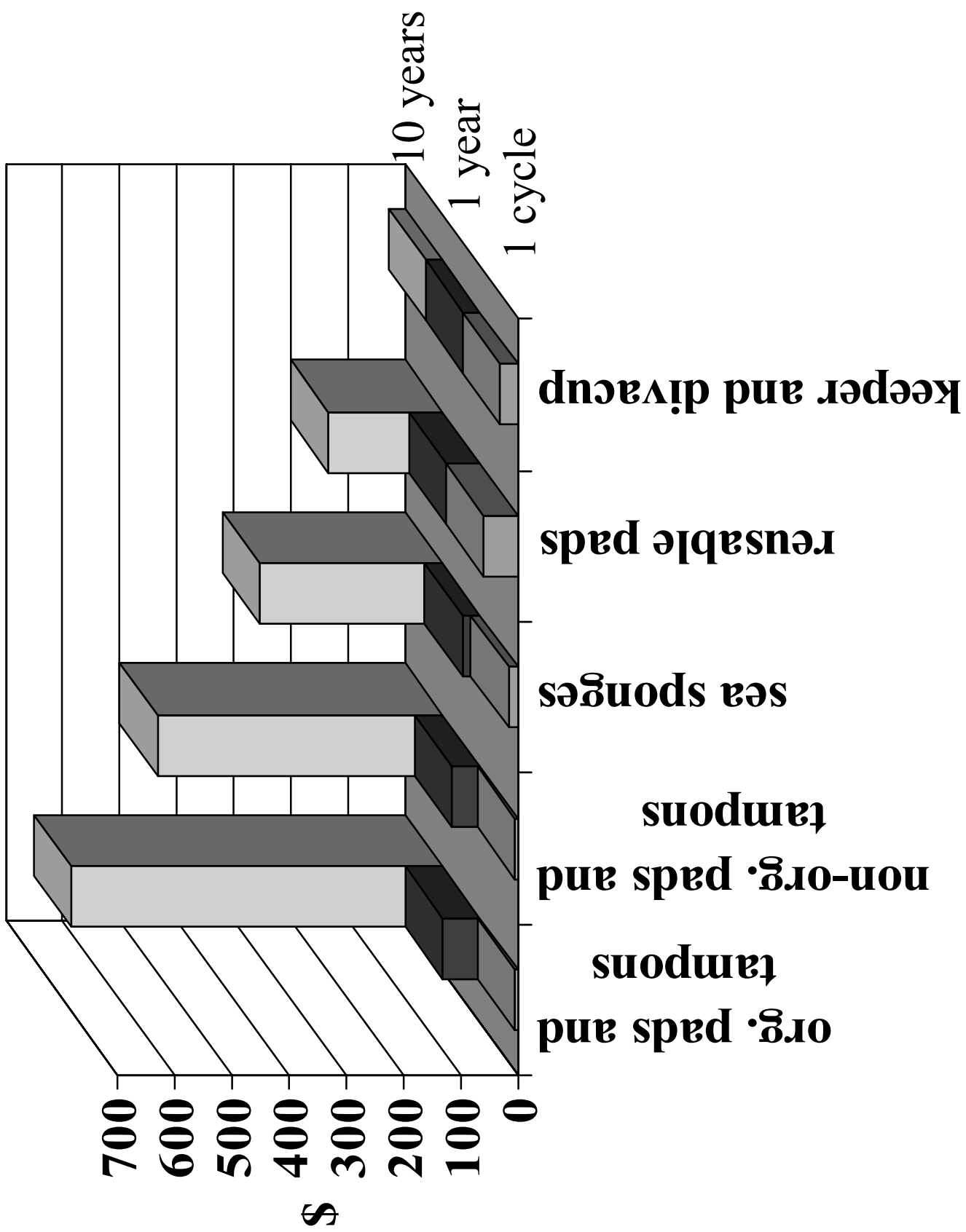
- Reusable
- No chlorine bleaching
- Affordable
- You can cut them to the size that is right for you
- Easy to use
- Extremely comfortable – you can't really feel them when you're wearing them
- Fun to wash in public!



Bad Aspects

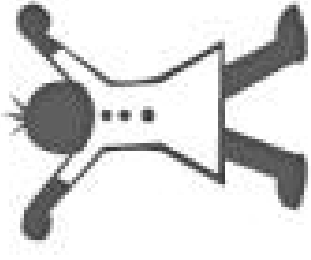
- Since they dwell on the ocean floor, their may be pollutants or toxins in them
- They begin to disintegrate after several months – no studies have been done on the effects of this
- Disintegrating sponge particles + most absorbent part of one's body = potentially hazardous
- Could be environmentally unfriendly given that they're harvested from the bottom of the ocean
- They have to be cleaned well
- Can be messy to change
- Like tampons, absorb more than just menstrual blood and affect pH balance
- An animal product, they're not vegan
- Not sterile

Price Comparison



For more information, try the following sources:

- Tampaction (tampaction.org)
- The New Our Bodies, Ourselves by the Boston Women’s Health Collective
- The Museum of Menstruation (MUM.org)
- The Body Project by Joan Brumberg



There is also pending legislation “to amend the Public Health Service Act to establish a program of research regarding the risks posed by the presence of dioxin, synthetic fibers, and other additives in feminine hygiene products, and to establish a program for the collection and analysis of data on toxic shock syndrome.” It is Rep. Carolyn Maloney’s H.R. 3411 “The Robin Danielson Act,” which has been sitting in the House Committee on Energy and Commerce’s Subcommittee on Health since it was referred there in July 2005. A similar bill (H.R. 373) introduced by Maloney in January 2003 was also referred to the Subcommittee on Health in February 2003 and no actions have been taken since. The Committee can be reached through <http://energycommerce.house.gov> or at (202)225-2927.