

SUSTAINABILITY

CFDA positions deadstock fabric as business solution to growing crisis

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During a recent virtual discussion, a panel of sustainable design experts joined the organization to talk through the financial benefits of circularity. Image credit: CFDA

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The **Council of Fashion Designers of America** (CFDA) is making the case that both profit and the planet can be prioritized.

As the extension of terms such as "deadstock," "closed loop" and "circular economy" become routine, there remain many misconceptions and concerns about repurposed materials in the fashion industry. Joined by a panel of sustainable design experts who presented the realities of deadstock fabrics, defined misunderstood terms and provided insights into their own experiences in the space, the organization attempts to get to the bottom of the circular design debate during a recent virtual event.

The April 20 webinar, "Deadstock: What's Old is New," was moderated by Sacha Brown, director of professional development at CFDA.

Greening the garment industry

While repurposing fabrics and putting excess inventory to use is recognized as sustainable, the business benefits have lacked the same credit.

To clarify its economic perks and affirm its conscious factor, CFDA stepped in with a virtual chat focused on the ways that earnings and environmental efforts can go hand in hand.

Hosted by the foundation, panelists included Stephanie Benedetto, CEO and cofounder of Queen of Raw, Carrie Freiman, senior director of sustainability at Reformation and Tsui Yuen-Pappas, director of sustainability at alice+olivia.

CFDA Webinar: Deadstock / What's Old is New

After each participant introduced themselves, climate and fashion tech entrepreneur Ms. Benedetto kicked off discussions regarding the scope of the industry's deadstock problem. A former corporate attorney, she spoke to the historic lack of data and consumption-focused business approaches that enabled the excess.

"When I started looking at this issue of deadstock we knew we had to start quantifying it to figure out how much is there and if this is a business opportunity," she started.

"When we first started looking at the issue way back in 2014, it was a \$120 billion worth of unused fabric that sits in warehouses collecting dust or being burned or sent to landfill annually," she said. "And as I'm sure you can imagine, through the pandemic and now with the recession, there has been a crisis of supply; more unused inventory than ever before because there have been canceled orders, closed stores, missed seasons and collections.

"And so this deadstock opportunity as I like to call it because we want to turn problems into opportunities has grown to a \$288 billion a year and growing problem."

"I had a factory and saw firsthand the massive amount of waste and breaks in complex supply chains. There are valuable resources sitting in warehouses collecting dust or being burned or sent for combustion." Thank you @CFDA for all the support! READ: <https://t.co/nGJgauIo1a> pic.twitter.com/dofCPqkXqg

Queen of Raw (@queenofraw) April 18, 2023

Ms. Benedetto helps companies struggling with this issue find out how to best put the surplus to use.

"We deal with one yard to tens of millions of yards of unused fabric, a lot of times in mint condition, still sealed on rolls just looking for a purpose and a use."

She shared her approach to quantifying the true amount of deadstock across the industry at large, revealing that she worked with bankers and research analysts to accomplish it.

According to their findings, 15 percent of every step in fashion production runs ends up as waste on average. This waste goes to landfills, warehouses and "middlemen" who buy it for very little.

Saves 10,321 gallons of water, 15 pounds of CO2, and could cause up to 23,512 compliments. <https://t.co/5ZXXJ79Jc7> pic.twitter.com/3TEZGEDnTk

Reformation (@Reformation) April 16, 2023

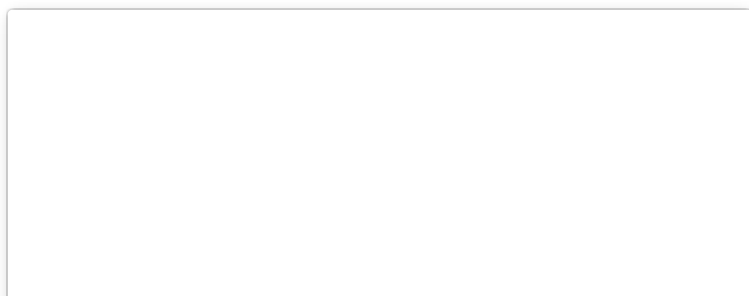
Next, Ms. Freiman spoke about Reformation's success in working with said materials, starting in 2009. Today, Reformation creates vintage-inspired pieces using sustainable fabrics and practices such as deadstock and limited-edition drops.

Ms. Yuen-Pappas also detailed her own work dealing with deadstock fabrics.

During the pandemic, she and those at alice+olivia took account of how much fabric they had left over and categorized them.

"We wanted to see if any of it was relevant for future seasons, so we isolated those fabrics, we made sure design was aware of them so that they can basically use those in the next up-and-coming collections that was a really easy thing to do," she said.

Following this move, Ms. Yuen-Pappas and her team set aside fabrics that offered longevity, such as tweed and solid colors, for the more immediate future.



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A post shared by alic + olivia by StaceyBendet (@aliceando...

Finally, seasonal fabrics were gathered and repurposed, reimagined into new forms.

The panel discussion pivoted to the legalities and standards surrounding deadstock.

Ms. Benedetto pointed out that standard requirements are rare in the industry, so the infrastructure is weak for deadstock reselling, repurposing or sustainably storing for future use internally. The other panelists agreed.

"There is no industry definition for deadstock, so I think that's something that we all need to hold hands and make sure we're all speaking the same language," Ms. Freiman said.

"At Reformation we define deadstock' as old, leftover and over-ordered fabric from other designers or fabric warehouses, and we have a verification process in place."

To ensure the purchase is sustainable, the process involves a query into the age of the fabric the company is buying, why the fabric is not selling and any accompanying documents. Additionally, Reformation tracks the rest of the fabric from the line that they did not buy to ensure the rest is sold, offering training to suppliers.



The clothing's vintage inspiration adds to its sustainability factor, as timeless styles remain in fashion, offering greater longevity than fleeting trends. Image credit: Reformation

Ms. Yuen-Pappas outlined the importance of communication between all parties in the process of selling and buying deadstock fabric, as well as marketing products made with the material. She also pointed out how effective the use of deadstock is in practice.

"The newness comes from design and we really focus on design you'll always be able to find some fabric in deadstock that suits those needs," she said.

Luxury lends a hand

All in all, the trio's experiences showcased the possibilities of turning waste into wares from a business point of view.

LVMH-owned online resale platform Nona Source has launched an ambassador program recently to promote this mindset, empowering sustainable designers to try out planet-friendly practices ([see story](#)).

Italian fashion label Valentino has also approached the growing fabric excess, redirecting it through a partnership in December 2022 ([see story](#)). Italian fashion label Gucci is putting deadstock to use in the form of a physical space, opening a new flagship in New York City ([see story](#)).

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