

Team Green Gang (Aurora Yuan and Alice Feng)

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Choose five items you use/consume/wear daily across different lifestyle categories, such as: food, energy, tech, clothing, transportation, etc. Research each item and find its estimated water footprint.

My 5 items and their corresponding water footprint:

Salad 21 gallons/serving

Coffee 34 gallons/cup

A 5 mile car ride $28.2258 \times 5 = 141.1$ gallons

T Shirt- 659 gallons to manufacture

Phone 3370 gallons to manufacture

Explain why those items require the amount of water that they do. Reflect on your research and answer the following questions: What surprised you about the water intensity of the items you use every day? What changes might you make in your own life and why, based on what you learned? Is there a more sustainable alternative to that item or does conserving water mean cutting it out altogether? Is that feasible?

The average American water footprint is 2,060 gallons per day. Compare that with Germans who have a water footprint of 1,030 gallons or the Chinese with 750 gallons, I know there is something inapposite in the American lifestyle. Though my personal footprint is slightly below the average, it is surprising to see that I consume excessive water everyday without being aware of its environmental effect. After some research, I found out that the top-10 clothing companies use over 1 million Olympic-size swimming pools of water a year. To my relief, it was reassuring to know that the top Nordic textile brands such as H&M and Ikea are working with Sweden Textile Water Initiative to reduce the water footprint of their suppliers. Considering that the total water footprint for the top-10 clothing companies is at least 740 billion gallons of water a year—or over 1 million Olympic-size swimming pools—changing how clothing is produced can reap huge benefits. While many of us have the luxury of living where clean water runs freely from the tap, where our waste is treated, we are enjoying these luxuries at the cost of others. We can no longer ignore the impacts of our water footprint simply because it happens in another part of the world. We must become global citizens, prepared to care for water, wherever it is being used, to ensure that it is treated with the respect it deserves. The message is simple: consume less and care more.

Many might be like me, disheartened by their unexpectedly high water footprint. Don't be. There are many things that we can do to make things better:

- Before you buy your next new outfit, pre-order an upcoming mobile phone, or buy more food than you can eat, **consider** how your water footprint will grow with these purchases. If we don't start consciously making more sustainable

consumption choices about the material objects we buy, it will be too late to change course.

- Look carefully at our **innovations** before they become commonplace.
 - A recent study has assessed the annual energy consumption of bitcoin to be nearly equal to that of Ireland. The water footprint of the electricity required to power these bitcoin mining operations is estimated at 1.13 billion gallons of freshwater per day, or 411 billion gallons per year (more than 1.5 billion bathtubs annually).
- Buy from **brands** who take caring for water seriously.
 - Look at what companies are doing to use water sustainably across their value chain by studying sustainability reports, reading water-disclosure statements, and learning about their water stewardship programs. It's up to **all of us** to do our homework and find out who these companies are and what they are doing to reverse these troubling trends. And, if it's not enough, we must demand more.

While thinking about alternatives, I'd like to think that less is more. Other than the daily necessities like food, complementary items like clothing and electronics can and should be cut down to the minimum. Success is often measured in how much we own: higher incomes followed by more clothes, fancy cars, the latest electronics, larger houses, and full cupboards. Success for companies is measured in increased sales, expanded plans, and more customers. All this comes at a cost. For transportation, another big part of everyone's virtual footprint, we need to think about greener solutions such as car pool and public transportation. When thinking about transportation, the carbon emission would more likely be the first thing that comes to people's mind, including mine. However, something that we've overlooked is the high usage of water. **While water is a renewable resource, it is NOT an unlimited resource.** When we have the luxury of having water on demand, many folks don't have the access to this. Low emission transportation would decrease both the excessive carbon and water consumption, making our lives more sustainable than it is when we opt for a personal car ride in a fancy car.

We are already pushing the planet beyond its limits. Without appropriate care to ensure more water is left in place to support the full diversity of our water bodies, we will lose economic opportunities that come from vibrant rivers, lakes, deltas, and estuaries. We will also not have enough clean water to drink, grow our food, or produce the goods we enjoy daily. This is our **watershed** moment. (pun intended) Let us commit as consumers, decision-makers, and engaged global citizens to make conscious choices that result in water being valued as the irreplaceable life-giving resource that it is.