



APPLICATORS

• UNWRAPPED •

The truth about 'plant-based' plastic tampon applicators

Greenwashing *[verb]*

green•wash•ing

“Greenwashing is the practice of making an unsubstantiated or misleading claim about the environmental benefits of a product, service, technology or practice. Greenwashing can make a company appear to be more environmentally friendly than it really is.”⁽¹⁾

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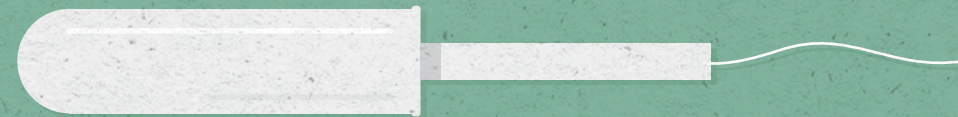
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SUMMARY

In recent years, many tampon brands have been introducing new 'plant-based' applicators with their tampons. From the outset, Natracare had suspicions about the environmental claims made regarding these applicators. These suspicions have now been confirmed.

Recent analysis from Greenpeace Laboratories has confirmed:

APPLICATORS WHICH ARE BEING
MARKETED AS 'PLANT-BASED' ARE
IDENTICAL TO OIL-BASED PLASTIC
APPLICATORS, AND ARE NO SAFER
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.



THE BACKGROUND

Single-use plastics are littering our planet and ending up in the stomachs of sea creatures, with particles appearing further up the human food chain.

THE PLASTIC PROBLEM IS NO LONGER SOMETHING SOCIETY CAN IGNORE.

Greenwashing is rife, as big, profit-driven businesses learn that they need to appeal to people's growing eco-consciousness if they want to compete in a changing market.

Lots of tampon companies sell tampons that use plastic applicators. Some organic brands do the same, and label or market their products with descriptions of 'plant-based plastic applicators', implying that they are safer for the environment.



SEA BIRDS EAT PLASTIC

BECAUSE IT SMELLS THE
SAME TO THEM AS FOOD⁽²⁾



DOLPHINS,
TURTLES, WHALES,
SEALS, BIRDS
AND FISH

have all been documented
EATING PLASTIC⁽³⁾



Green-minded menstruators see the words 'plant-based' on the box and they think that they are choosing an ecological alternative to oil-based plastic tampon applicators.

The suggestion is that plant-based applicators are biodegradable, compostable and guilt-free.

An estimated
12.7 MILLION TONNES
OF PLASTIC ENTERS OCEANS
EVERY YEAR⁽⁴⁾

49%
of this mass is
SINGLE-USE PLASTICS⁽⁵⁾

PLASTIC
takes around
500
YEARS
to break down

This is the

SAME

FOR SOME SEMI
RIGID PLANT-BASED
PLASTICS⁽⁶⁾

IT NEVER DISAPPEARS
It just turns into smaller particles
which end up in our water, soil and food

Actually, some plant-based plastic is polyethylene, which behaves identically to oil-based polyethylene. Once it has been disposed of, it will never biodegrade. Instead, it will break down into microplastic particles over hundreds of years.

The term 'plant-based plastic' has been used deceptively in marketing to imply that items are less harmful to the environment after their disposal, when often, the opposite is true.

PLANT-BASED AND PROBLEMATIC

WHAT ARE PLANT-BASED PLASTICS, EXACTLY?

Compostable and biodegradable plastics do exist, and they do decompose in the right environments - like industrial or home composting systems. ⁽⁷⁾

However, just because a plastic is labelled 'plant-based', it doesn't mean that it is a compostable or biodegradable plastic.

The term 'plant-based' refers to the source of the material itself, not how the resulting plastic will behave after it's been thrown away.

Plant-based plastic is created from agricultural scraps, such as sugarcane, corn, wheat or food waste. ⁽⁸⁾

The end product is often polyethylene (PE) or polypropylene (PP) - the exact same plastic as toothbrushes, fizzy drink bottles, pens, plastic bags, straws... and it persists in the environment in just the same way. PP and PE do not biodegrade or decompose in any natural environment.

Only 20% of the ingredients need to be from renewable, plant material for a plastic to be labelled 'plant-based'. The remaining 80% could be made from fossil fuels and chemical additives. ⁽⁹⁾

You can read more about the confusion around plastics [here](#)

SEMI-RIGID PLANT-BASED PLASTICS ARE LARGELY DERIVED FROM SUGARCANE ⁽¹⁰⁾

SUGARCANE PLANTATIONS IN BRAZIL ARE DRIVING MASS DEFORESTATION OF THE AMAZON RAINFOREST ⁽¹¹⁾



REPORT FINDINGS



THE FATE OF POLYETHYLENE FROM FOSSIL AND BIO-SOURCES, BOTH IN THE WASTE STREAM AND IN THE ENVIRONMENT, WILL BE THE SAME; POLYETHYLENE IS AN ENVIRONMENTALLY PERSISTENT PLASTIC.



- Greenpeace laboratory report on plastic tampon applicators

The analysis conducted by Greenpeace Laboratories has found that plant-based plastic applicators are chemically identical to oil-based plastic applicators, at the point of disposal.

These plastic applicators do not biodegrade and they contain concerning chemical residues that do not belong inside the human vagina.

You can read Greenpeace Laboratories' analysis here - [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)

TAMPON APPLICATORS TESTED BY GREENPEACE LABORATORIES

BRAND	SOLD AS ORGANIC?	MARKETED AS 'PLANT-BASED'?	APPLICATOR IS MADE FROM?	DOES IT BIODEGRADE?
7th Generation	Yes	Yes	Polyethylene	No
Organyc (Compact)	Yes	Yes ('bio-based')	Polyethylene	No
O.B Organic	Yes	Yes	Polyethylene	No
Cora	Yes	No	Polyethylene	No
L	Yes	No	Polyethylene	No
Kotex Security (Super)	No	No	Polyethylene	No
Playtex Gentel Glide 360	No	No	Polyethylene	No
Tampax Pearl	No	No	Polyethylene	No

When it comes to the end product, there is no difference between the 'plant-based' plastic applicators sold with organic tampons, and the conventional plastic applicators sold with both organic and non-organic tampons. All applicators tested were polyethylene, which will never biodegrade.

WHAT MENSTRUATORS THINK

We asked the question:

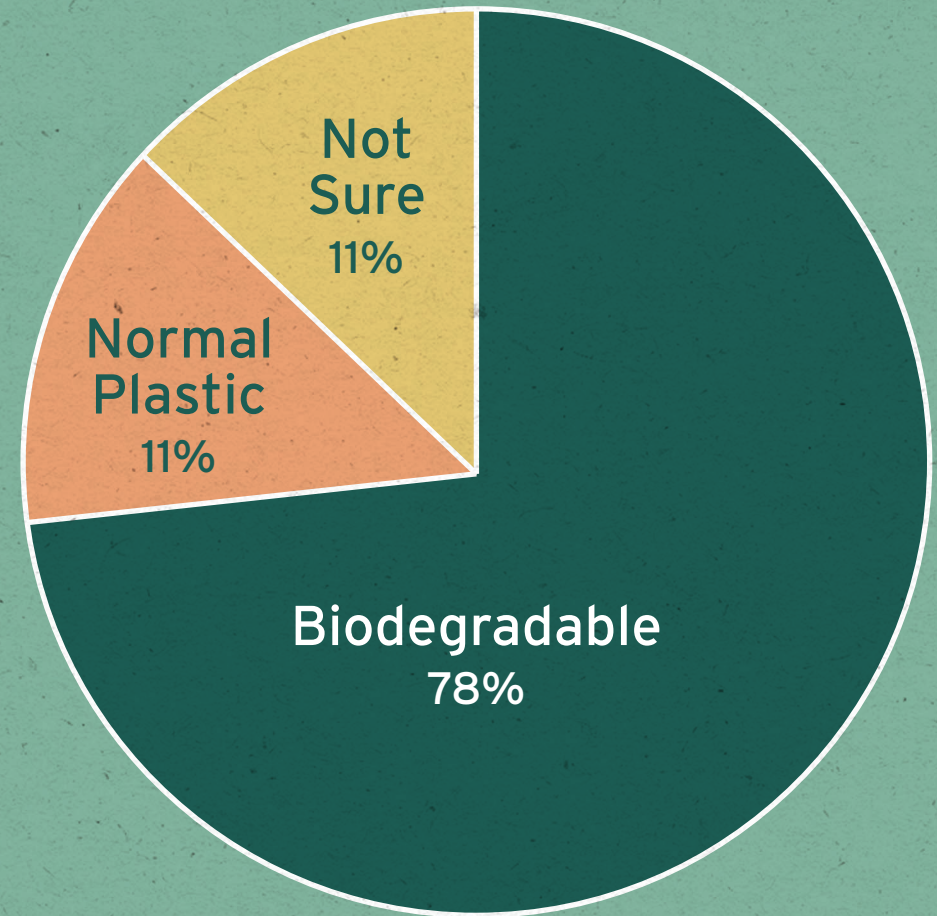
'What do you think when you read the words plant-based plastic?'

The options people had to choose from were:

- A) A compostable and biodegradable alternative to plastic
- B) Normal plastic, as we know it, but made mostly from plant-based materials
- C) I'm not sure

78% of people* asked thought that 'plant-based' means biodegradable and compostable. And a further 11% of people were not sure what it meant.

11% of people guessed correctly and realised that often, 'plant-based plastic' is too good to be true.



*122 people responded



TOP 1000 REVIEWER

★★★★★ Better For Your Body, and The Environment

March 12, 2018

Style: Super

I've bought many Seventh Generation products before and been very satisfied with their products. I didn't realize they made organic tampons as well. I like the fact that these are made of 100% cotton without any harmful chemicals. **The best thing is the applicator - rather than plastic, it's made of biodegradable, plant-based materials.** It was just as easy to use as regular Tampax. As with most organic products, the price is higher but you are paying for piece of mind, especially for something you're inserting inside your body.

One person found this helpful



0 votes



Question: Is the plastic applicator BPA and chemical free as well, since the tampon sits inside of it awaiting use?

Answer: Yes! **The applicator is made of 90% plant-based material, 10% plastic and contains no chemicals.**

By A Manufacturer [MANUFACTURER](#) on November 15, 2017

Great eco friendly tampon

★★★★★ 5 of 5

March 10, 2018

I have already been a user of the applicator free tampons in the past, but honestly, I prefer an applicator on my tampons. **The OB plant based applicator is a great, eco friendly tampon** that I can use without feeling guilty.



★★★★★ A Healthy Alternative from a GREAT Company!

March 10, 2018

Style: Regular

These provide great peace of mind. They may be slightly more expensive than Tampax (my usual brand), but they are easily worth it. Seventh Generation believes in transparency with their consumers. And, in this case, consumers can rest assured that these are fragrance-free, chlorine-free, and that **the smooth applicator is biodegradable.** Healthy you, and healthy environment. Win-win! (And, yes, the box can be recycled).

Helpful [Comment](#)



TOP 500 REVIEWER

★★★★★ Comfortable and Easy to Use

June 4, 2018

Style: Regular

The Seventh Generation Organic Regular Absorbency Cotton Tampons with Comfort Applicator work great.

These come in cardboard packing for the box. The box provides all the information you'd need to know about the product and how to use it. Each tampon is wrapped in an easy to open paper wrapper. The wrappers show you where to open it so you have the insertion part of the tampon on the opposite end ready for usage.

These have a 95% plant-based applicator so it will decompose far quicker than most on the market. The applicator makes for a smooth and comfortable transition for wearing.

Helpful [Comment](#)



★★★★★ Superior, safe tampon

April 8, 2018

Size: Super

Originally I tried the cardboard applicator in the regular size and did not like them. **I wanted a plastic-like applicator** that would not be irritating. The compact size is great! Fits easily in your purse or pocket, and the packaging is strong so it doesn't rip open if you carry it in your purse for a while.

These are great and absorb well! **Love that the applicator is biodegradable!**

Helpful [Comment](#)

NEXT STEPS

RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS TO PUT PRESSURE ON BRANDS

We want to encourage people to vote with their money and choose options that don't harm the planet.

CARDBOARD TAMPON APPLICATORS

ARE TOTALLY BIODEGRADABLE! 

CHOOSE PLASTIC-FREE OPTIONS

Natracare sells tampons with cardboard applicators, but there are plenty of plastic-free options available. Plastic applicators just aren't necessary.

GOTS MUST TAKE ACTION

Since 2017, Natracare has been working alongside the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) to close the loophole which allows for environmentally damaging single-use plastics to be certified along with organic tampons. Our message has been heard and GOTS is currently reviewing the standard. We will remain vigilant until the standard is changed.

The average
PLASTIC TAMPON APPLICATOR
IS USED FOR 10 SECONDS



IT LASTS FOREVER

(15)

BETTER RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF NEW PLASTICS ON THE MARKET

Governments have a responsibility to be transparent about what can and can't be recycled, and where to recycle. This is especially important as new plastic types become available.

SPREAD THE WORD

No matter whether you're an individual or from an organisation, we need you to show the tampon industry that you won't stand for greenwashing.

Can you spread the word?

You can find some downloadable social media images and posts [here](#)

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WHO ARE NATRACARE?

Natracare was founded in 1989 by Susie Hewson. Susie was shocked at the lack of healthy, environmentally-conscious options for women's periods - so she took matters into her own hands and created the world's first organic and plastic-free tampon.

**NATRACARE HAS ALWAYS
BEEN DRIVEN BY ETHICS.**

Natracare seeks to highlight plastic waste in the menstrual product industry; to improve awareness of women's health issues; and to spread the word about the benefits of organic.

