Brands have started using recycled plastic to solve the plastic pollution problem plaguing the world's waterways. However, experts are cautious about the impact of this approach.

"Using recycled plastic waste is just one important part of our overall sustainability strategy," says a spokesperson. Through a partnership with Parley, for example, the company intercepts plastic "from beaches and coastal communities before it reaches the Oceans, aimed at educating global communities and cleaning plastic waste from the oceans," they add.

Working to reduce plastic waste in the oceans is almost inevitably a positive move. Experts are unequivocal: recycled plastic is better than virgin plastic and any effort that reduces or removes plastics from the oceans is worth pursuing. But, recycled plastics, not eliminating plastic, is where major brands seem to be putting their efforts.

"A bathing suit [made] out of recycled plastic doesn't excite me. It's really not going to make any real environmental benefit falls short," says Savitz.

In honour of World Oceans Day last week, these brands and others promoted products made from plastic waste and engaged in campaigns focused on ocean health — Adidas, for example, has alternatives that do the same job as ordinary plastic. These materials are more sustainable when comparing the overall impact, including transportation costs, of using plastic versus recycled plastic, says Savitz, but not always easier to turn into a finished product.

"A lot of the time, recycled plastics are not made just because you simply use recycled plastic in your product. The whole business has to do the math and understand the costs and benefits of using recycled plastic," says Savitz.

Yet, recycled plastics, not eliminating plastic, is where major brands seem to be putting their efforts. This is a trend that could provide a blueprint for bigger companies looking to reduce their reliance on plastic. Swimwear label Seamorgens does not use any plastic at all, says owner and co-founder Michelle Morgan, other than the plastic packaging components, and that in 2021, plastic with recycled content reached 61 per cent of a total of 500 tons, up from 49 per cent in 2020.

"The idea of the brand and the product is sustainability, so it's not a comment," says Morgan. "We have to talk about why we are using plastic, why we are using virgin plastic instead of working out the maths..."

Another label, Masarà, prioritises recycled paper and minimised resources overall, say founder Francesca Fabris. "This also extends to in-house activities and not just direct packaging components, and that in 2021, plastic with recycled content reached 61 per cent of a total of 500 tons, up from 49 per cent in 2020."

"We can't really collect, process and use it all the time, but we can buy recycled plastic at a cheaper price, which is why we prefer it," says Fabris. "We are striving to use more recycled plastics in our product, and we are working on it."

"We are running some projects and initiatives to promote recycling in the fashion industry," says Fabris. "We are working on it, and we are looking for ways to reduce the impact of our production."

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