



# China's climate goals: Beijing aims to recycle 25 per cent of all textile waste, increase recycled fibre output by 2025

- Country hopes to greatly increase its recycling capability and have a waste textile recycling system 'initially established' by 2025
- Beijing's guidelines show it plans to focus on raising public awareness and acceptance of upcycled fibres, Novetex Textiles' Ronna Chao says



**Martin Choi**

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A facility operated by a second-hand clothing trading firm in Hangzhou. In 2020, China produced around 22 million tonnes of textile waste and recycled around 20 per cent of it. Photo: Bloomberg

China aims to recycle 25 per cent of all its textile waste and churn out 2 million tonnes of recycled fibre by 2025 as part of its push to peak its carbon emissions by 2030 and become carbon-neutral by 2060.

It hopes to greatly increase its recycling capability and have a waste textile recycling system “initially established” by 2025, according to a document jointly released by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the ministry of industry and information technology and the ministry of Commerce on Monday.

According to the document “Implementation Opinions on Accelerating the Recycling of Waste Textiles”, the government hopes to have in place by 2030 a relatively complete system achieving a recycling rate of 30 per cent for waste textiles and producing 3 million tonnes of recycled fibre.

“With the continuous improvement in people’s living standards, more and more used clothing [is being put to waste], and the problem of recycling textile waste has become increasingly prominent,” Zhao Kai, vice-chairman of the China Association of Circular Economy, said in a statement on the NDRC’s website.

In 2020, China produced around 22 million tonnes of textile waste, and had a recycling rate of around 20 per cent, according to the NDRC. Around 1.5 million tonnes of recycled fibre was produced from textile waste that year.

Monday’s document will help to promote the development of a resource and waste material recycling industry and holds “great significance” in helping China achieve its goals of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, Zhao said.

Measures outlined in the document include promoting green and low-carbon production in the textile industry; improving China’s recycling network; and promoting the comprehensive use of textile waste. Awareness among producers and consumers of the importance of recycling was also expected to be significantly raised by 2030, according to the document.

Beijing’s guidelines show that it did not simply want to recycle old garments, but also plans to focus on raising public awareness and acceptance of upcycled fibres, said Ronna Chao, chairwoman of Novetex Textiles and creator of the Billie System, which turns textile waste into usable yarn.

“Recycling garments into low-quality scraps in huge quantities is not what the world is looking for today. Promoting and supporting the production and consumption of upcycled products that also satisfy our needs in terms of style, functionality, comfort and pricing will contribute significantly to a circular economy,” Chao said.

The textile supply chain was the source of multifaceted environmental degradation, and recycling was key to improving the sustainability of textile production. About 2,700 litres of water are required to produce a single cotton T-shirt, enough to sustain one person for 900 days, according to calculations made by the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Every tonne of recycled cotton yarn saves half a hectare (1.2 acres) of agricultural land, cuts 6.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions and conserves 2,783 cubic metres of irrigation water, according to a paper by researchers at the Hefei University of Technology, published in 2020 in the *International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*.