

Flawed Study on Diapers Released in Britain

The Environment Agency of the UK has published "Life Cycle Assessment of Disposable and Reusable Nappies in the UK" (<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/yourenv/857406/1072214/>). This study was a top news story across the UK when it was released yesterday, May 19, 2005, concluding that "there was no significant difference between any of the environmental impacts" for the diaper systems studied. This conclusion is, unfortunately, quite misleading.

Diaper life cycle study is flawed. The report issued not a comparison of disposable and reusable diapers but a study focusing on the environmental impact of disposable or one-time use diapers. More than 2,000 parents using disposable diapers were questioned. Only 183 parents using reusable diapers were surveyed, 37% of whom used relatively high-impact terry nappies not commonly used in the U.S. The Women's Environmental Network of the UK has issued a statement further detailing flaws (http://www.wen.org.uk/general_pages/Newsitems/ms_LCA19.5.05.htm) in the study.

Study shows careful laundering can reduce environmental impact. Even using the study's self-acknowledged weak assumptions, the conclusion does not reflect the significant reduction of environmental impact resulting from use of energy-efficient washing, as shown within the body of the report. The report shows that users of home-laundered cloth diapers can reduce environmental impact up to 38% through their laundering choices. Energy rating (http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=about.ab_index), washing temperature, and number of diapers laundered have a significant impact on the numbers.

Important information missing from this study. Studies necessarily draw boundaries. It is important to ask what information lacking in the study is still necessary for parents to make informed decisions about diapering. Environmental renewability and availability of petroleum resources are not a consideration in the study. Other studies have raised concerns about the negative impact on babies' health of disposable diaper use. And, financial costs to parents can be much lower with use of cloth diapers. See Real Diaper Association's links to health, environment, and cost documentation (<http://www.realdiaperassociation.org/diaperfacts.php>).

Real Diaper Association looks forward to efforts to address the flaws of the study and its conclusions. Parents and manufacturers of diapers can take this opportunity to assess and reduce environmental impact.

Contact: Lori Taylor
Phone: 716/835-7233, e-mail: lori@realdiaperassociation.org

Suggestions for parents:

- Use Energy Star rated washing machines.
- Wash diapers at 140 degrees.
- Air dry.

- Use washable wipes and liners.
- Use low-impact detergent.
- Use organic products.
- Reuse diapers for the next child, then give them away or sell them to another.

Environment Agency, "Disposable nappies or reusables – does it make any difference to our environment?," May 2005.

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/yourenv/857406/1072214/>

Women's Environmental Network, "Environment Agency nappy report is seriously flawed," May 19, 2005. http://www.wen.org.uk/general_pages/Newsitems/ms_LCA19.5.05.htm

U.S. government Energy Star program.

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=about.ab_index

Real Diaper Association, Diaper Facts.

<http://www.realdiaperassociation.org/diaperfacts.php>