

# Fairyland Trust Survey of Plastic in Halloween Costumes and Clothing 2018

A [Fairyland Trust](#) survey of Halloween costumes on sale at major UK retailers shows they are made up of 90% plastic, mainly polyester. Given their average weight, and the number of costumes bought, sold and thrown away each year, this can be expected to create over 2,600 tonnes of new plastic waste, equivalent to more than 100 million coke bottles.

The Fairyland Trust charity is trying to eliminate new plastic from all its events and Workshops, and [is offering advice to families](#) on how to dress up and look good for Halloween without buying new plastic. It's nature-based family event [The Real Halloween](#) at Bradmoor Woods in Norfolk (27/28 Oct) includes a [no-new-plastic Fancy Dress Competition](#).

The Trust has also [contacted retailers](#) to ask them to avoid selling new plastic Halloween costumes in future, and is encouraging other event organisers to also try and go plastic-free.

## The Survey Findings - Plastic In Shop Halloween Costumes

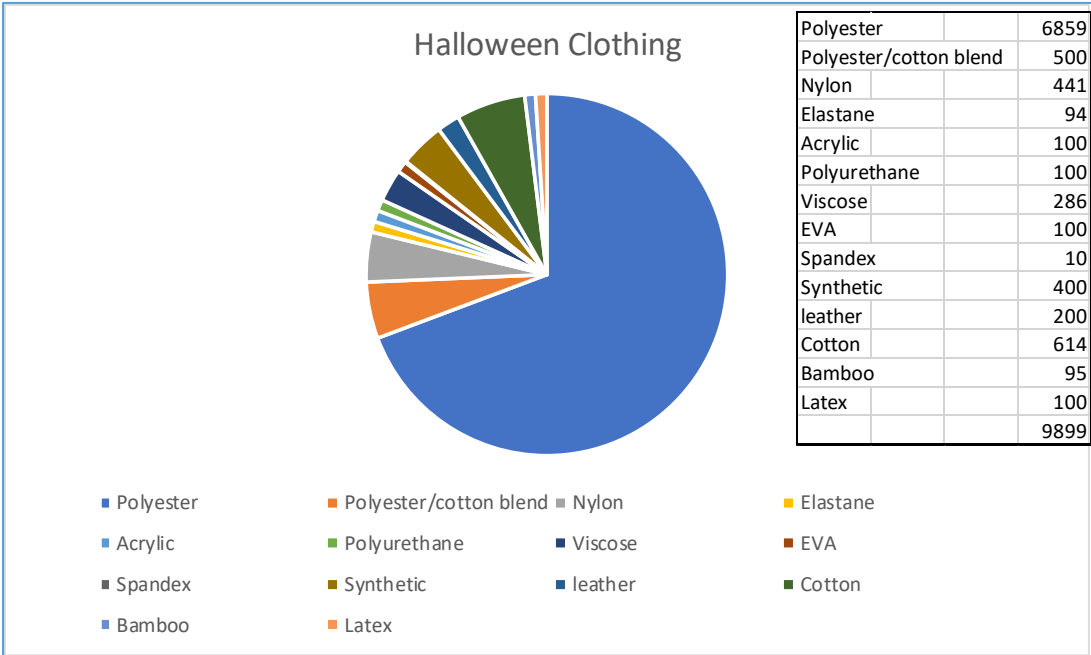
Earlier this year (July) we looked at 100 Halloween costumes and clothing [1] for sale online by retailers Marks and Spencers, Next, Top Shop, ASOS, H & M and Amazon. We searched for 'Halloween Costume' and looked at the product details for each item, which give the percentages of materials used. This showed that overall, the costumes were 90% made from plastic.

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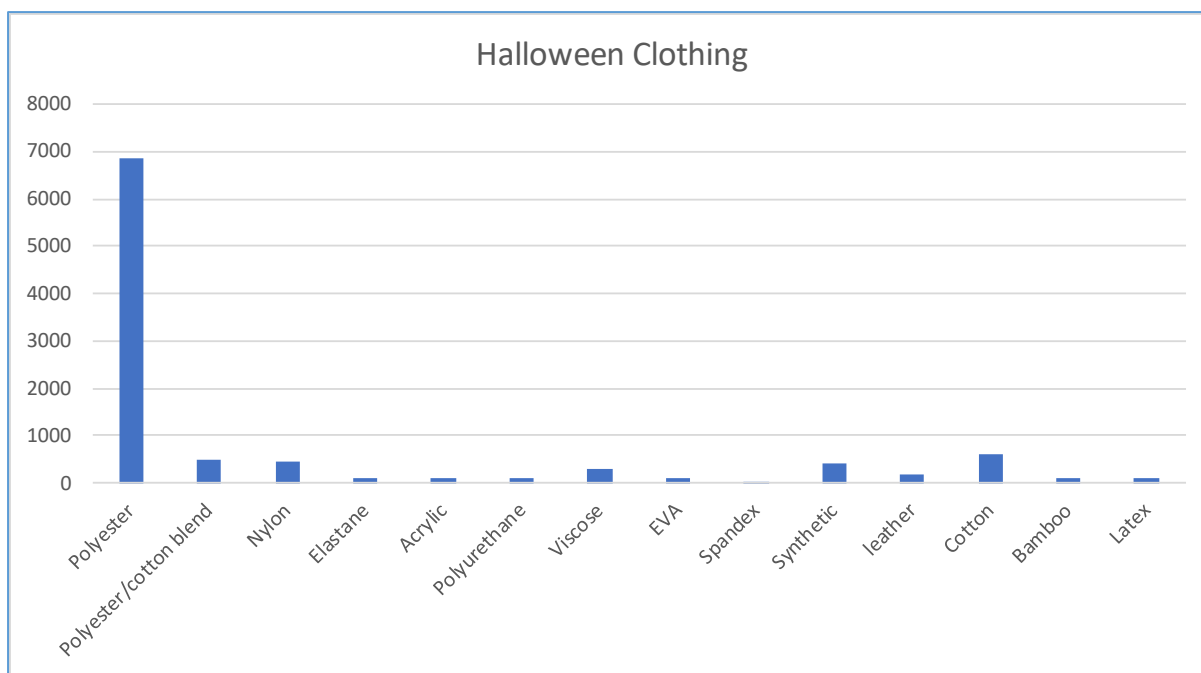


*Above: results from our survey of a hundred online costumes showing the net results of adding up the percentages given in retailers information*

The plastic was overwhelmingly polyester, followed by polyester/cotton mix and nylon. The 10% non-plastic material included leather, bamboo, latex and cotton.



*Above: cumulative percentages for the content of 100 Halloween costumes from some major retailers.*



*(The categories are those given by the retailers – eg “synthetic” could also mean polyester.)*

### Total Amount of Plastic Waste

A single costume may not make much of a difference but it all adds up and contributes to the plastic problem. The average weight of ten of these costumes was 426 grammes, 90% of which is 383g costume.

Last year a [survey](#) funded by the North London Waste Authority and run by NGO [Hubbub](#), found that some seven million Halloween costumes are thrown away each year. Seven million costumes at 0.38kg each is 2.66 million kilogrammes of plastic. One million kg is 1000 tonnes, so 2.66 mkg = 2660 tonnes of additional plastic waste generated.

By comparison one standard sized Coke bottle contains 25g of PET (a very similar substance to polyester), so 40 coke bottles contain 1kg of plastic. 2660 tonnes plastic of Coke bottles = 106.4 million bottles.

This is similar to the weight of plastic [waste generated at Easter](#) in egg-wrappings but doesn't take into account other Halloween plastic such as party kits and decorations, much of which

are also plastic, or Halloween food packaging, most of which quickly becomes 'rubbish' and ultimately, breaks down to be plastic pollution.

Although we only had resources for a small survey, plastic waste from Halloween is clearly a fast-growing problem, and Halloween costumes contain even more 'hidden plastic' than normal clothing. A 2014 study by the waste agency WRAP found 45% or nearly [half of all clothing](#) bought-new in the UK is made up of 'hidden' plastic such as polyester, acrylic or nylon, rather than natural fibres. In 2017 the industry group Textile Exchange [found that](#) 64% of global textile production was plastic, mostly polyester. Manufacturers are increasingly interested in using traditional natural fabrics like cotton or wool as well as new substitute lignin/ cellulose (plant-based) materials such as [Tencel](#) or [Lyocell](#) but these are still a small proportion of the market, if growing rapidly [2].

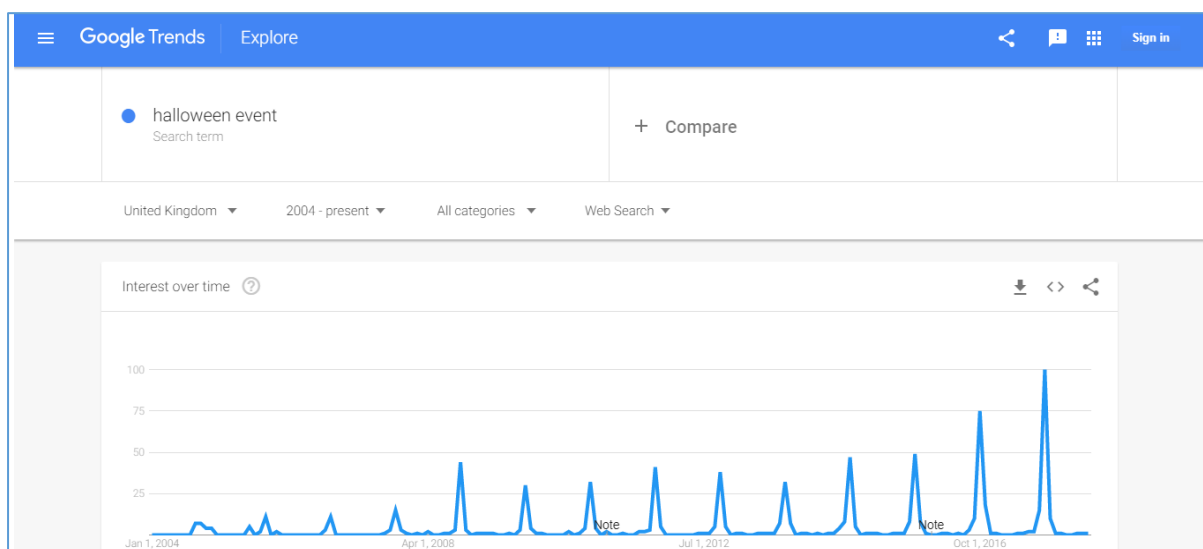
This survey shows that in Halloween costumes the proportion of oil-based plastic is much higher. Very little material used to make clothing is recycled into new garments [3].

### **Growing Popularity of Halloween**

More such costumes are being bought as the number of people participating in Halloween increases. In 2017 a poll of mothers for Channel Mum [found that](#) 84% of families planned to celebrate Halloween, with 94% planning on buying outfits (up from 82% in 2016). The 2017 Hubbub study calculated that 33m people dressed up for Halloween, and in households with children the proportion with at least one person dressing up rose to 79%. 4 in 10 costumes were worn only once.

Halloween has become big business. Britons now spend over £300m celebrating each Halloween and in 2016 market research agency [Mintel](#) found that alongside sweets and chocolate the top five Halloween purchasing categories were 'pumpkins, fancy dress items, decorations and cosmetics'. A 2015 Verdict shoppers survey [found](#) that 55% of those spending on retail for Halloween bought clothing. Britons are high buyers of new and disposable clothing [4].

In the UK interest in 'Halloweening' [increased sharply](#) in the second decade of the C21st and with [Millennials](#) joining the party along with children and families, dressing up is a large part of it.



*Above: Google trends for interest in 'Halloween Event' in the UK. Commercial Halloween events are growing in popularity in other countries eg [Japan](#) but also criticised for displacing authentic traditional forms of Halloween (eg in [Germany and Australia](#) )*

See [here](#) for information on what The Fairyland Trust is doing to cut out plastic.

October 2018, Chris Rose

## Notes

[1] the results we analysed came from using the store's own search engines, and included both adult garments and children's including bespoke costumes

[2] Wood v. Oil <http://threeworlds.campaignstrategy.org/?p=2150> and, Textile Exchange reported in 2017 that of 95 companies reporting on fibre choices, 'demand for lyocell grew by a staggering 128 per cent' <http://textileexchange.org/downloads/2017-preferred-fiber-materials-market-report/>

[3] The 2017 MacArthur Foundation study *A New Textiles Economy* found ‘less than 1% of material used to produce clothing is recycled into new clothing’, and ‘across the industry, only 13% of the total material input is in some way recycled after clothing use’. (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion’s future*, (2017, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>)

[4] The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee [found](#) that British consumers buy more ‘fast fashion’ clothing than counterparts in N Europe (26.7kg per head compared for instance to 12.6kg in Sweden). [It costs](#) £82m a year to landfill clothes in the UK.

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The **Fairyland Trust** is a conservation charity based in Norfolk which has engaged over 150,000 children and their families in nature since 2001. It runs workshops, events and activities in which young children make something magical and in the course of that discover natural history and folklore, for example learning to identify native trees from the Magic Wands workshop.

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