

T1654

NC 0020986 4



National College of Art and Design;

Faculty of Design,

Department of Industrial Design

**An Embarrassed Market:**

A study of the history, design and marketing  
of sanitary wear.

by

Asumpta Sweeney

1996

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary  
Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design in Industrial Design.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their help with my thesis,

Edward Murphy, Head Librarian,  
Gemma Bradley, Assistant Librarian and the staff of NCAD library,

The Women's Environmental Network,

Anne McLear, Women's studies graduate  
University College Dublin, who was very helpful,

the following sanitary wear manufacturers;

Smith & Nephew

Tambrands Ltd.

Procter and Gamble

Kimberly - Clark

Johnson and Johnson,

and my tutor Hilary O'Kelly.



# Table Of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1.
Chapter I. History	4.
Chapter II. The First Commercial Products	8.
Chapter III. Problems With Existing Products	
- Health risks	20
- Environmental concerns	24
Chapter IV. Taboo	31
Marketing	34
Chapter V. Big Business, Small Wonder	45
Chapter VI. Alternatives to Commercial Sanitary Wear	49
Conclusion	59
End Notes	61
Appendices	66
Bibliography	71



## List of Plates

<u>No.</u>	<u>P a g e</u>
1. Oldest known depiction of a <u>Tampax</u> tampon (1931).....	12
2. Tampon compressor (1935).....	12
3. First tampon advertisement (1936).....	16
4. Incinerator disposal unit, for public toilets.....	25
5. Chemical disposal unit for public toilets.....	27
6. Disposal bags.....	28
7. Women's Environmental Network, disposal bags.....	29
8. Advert illustrating unwrapped tampon (1994).....	35
9. <u>Tampax</u> packaging (1930 - 1996).....	38
10. <u>Always</u> product packaging.....	40
11. Advertisement illustrating <u>Always</u> 'easy wrap' packaging .....	42
12. Belt to hold looped sanitary towels.....	44
13. <u>Naturacare</u> towels.....	49
14. <u>Womankind</u> reusable sanitary towels.....	51
15. Pattern for making your own reusable towels.....	54
16. <u>The Keeper</u> .....	57



## INTRODUCTION

This thesis will discuss the history<sup>1</sup>, design and marketing of sanitary wear. It will look at the historical development of these products and the practical issues women have encountered using sanitary wear, in both the past and modern times. It will also observe the relationship between changes in women's lifestyles and changes in sanitary wear. In order to do this, the thesis will endeavour to meet the following objectives;

1. It will investigate what women used in the past.
2. It will describe when and how commercial sanitary towels and tampons were first invented and marketed, and how they have been developed.
3. It will explore the problems that exist with commercial sanitary wear.
4. It will discuss the taboos which surround menstruation, and how they have formed / influenced attitudes towards sanitary wear.
5. Advertising is the means by which sanitary wear is promoted. Advertising has brought menstruation out of the personal female realm and into the public gaze which is the male domain. This thesis will examine how advertising agencies and advertising authorities have dealt with these advertisements and how the public have received them.
6. It will investigate the sanitary wear industry, to find out what it is worth and who it serves.
7. It will discover and assess the alternatives available to women who are aware of the economic and environmental implications of using commercial sanitary wear.



Sanitary wear is an unusual product. It is used in some form by women all over the world regardless of culture or race. So, we have a world wide market for a product that is a necessity. It is difficult to find a comparable product. In the House of Commons debate on removing VAT from sanitary wear, razors were used as an example of a similar product for men. But a razor is not essential, a man may not wish to grow a beard but if he has to it will not affect his daily routine. If women do not have sanitary wear of some kind they incur great difficulty. It is uncomfortable to move or work when menstruating without protection as blood would seep through clothes and there would be problems with odour. Toilet paper and nappies are products which have some similarities. They have both been used in some form, since the beginning of time. Toilet paper has a universal market. Some sanitary wear is made from the same materials as toilet paper, nappys and surgical dressings and they are manufactured by the same companies, for example Kimberly-Clark make Kotex towels and also produce Kleenex tissue paper.

‘Feminine hygiene products’ and ‘sanitary protection’ (known in the trade as sanpro) are the two terms used in relation to provision for women when they are menstruating. Sanitary towels and tampons are for women but they do not have or confer the womanly, ladylike qualities that the word feminine implies. The vagina is not a wound and does not become so during menstruation, so there is no need for the emphasis on products being hygienic and sanitary. “Menstrual products remain a necessary part of life for women. Women are expected to buy, store and use them without men noticing. Who or what is to be protected with ‘sanitary protection’?”<sup>2</sup>



The word protection is also inappropriate, "I object to the idea that women need protecting from the healthy workings of their own bodies".<sup>3</sup> Although somewhat unsatisfactory 'sanitary wear' is the term chosen by Anne McLear to refer to these products, and it is the term which I will be using throughout this thesis.

### Sources

There is a large collection of literature on menstruation, which can be loosely divided into four categories. These are, the biology of menstruation<sup>4</sup>, ancient and present day taboos<sup>5</sup>, studies of sanitary wear advertising<sup>6</sup> and the relationship between menstruation and lunar cycles<sup>7</sup>. However, there is very little gathered information on sanitary wear, for example, the history of the product has yet to be put together. As there is no physical evidence to determine what women used in the distant past, conclusions are not definite. A more recent history of what poor women had to use was also difficult to obtain. Historical and market information is available from the manufacturers. Market research journals provide an analysis of the sanitary wear industry. The World Wide Web contains directories dedicated to the subject of menstruation and sanitary wear. Through E-mail I received personal information regarding women's experiences using sanitary wear, I also gathered information by interviewing women about the early decades of this century in both rural and urban areas. There are some organisations who have a particular interest in sanitary wear, for example The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) and the Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturer (ASPM).



# **CHAPTER I.**

## **HISTORY**

Women regard the sanitary protection industry as essential, so much so that they cannot imagine what women used before commercial products became available.

### **Ancient Times**

It has been established that when people first inhabited the planet, women played an important role in the gathering of food. It would have been difficult for their survival and their families if they had to spend five days out of every month out of action. "Native American women traditionally bled onto moss while sitting on the earthen floor of the moon lodge",<sup>1</sup> returning their menstrual blood to the earth. Women bleed consistently throughout their period and have no control over the flow. So, women would have had to squat on the ground throughout their period. But if women moved around at all, an unchecked menstrual flow would have resulted in badly chapped and painful inner thighs, especially in colder or windy weather, with the added risk of infection in hot climates. The resulting skin scabbing would hardly have had a chance to heal before the menstrual flow started again.

It is most likely that women used leaves, moss, fur or wool and, in the absence of knickers to hold their improvised pads they, "devised menstrual slips or belts".<sup>2</sup> A number of indicators point to this solution. In the wild, female monkeys are observed to bunch up pads of leaves to wipe off

1. The first part of the report discusses the general situation of the company and the results of the work done during the year. It also mentions the financial position and the state of the company's assets.

2. The second part of the report deals with the management of the company and the measures taken to improve its efficiency. It also mentions the results of the work done by the management and the state of the company's affairs.

3. The third part of the report discusses the financial position of the company and the results of the work done during the year. It also mentions the state of the company's assets and the results of the work done by the management.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the management of the company and the measures taken to improve its efficiency. It also mentions the results of the work done by the management and the state of the company's affairs.

5. The fifth part of the report discusses the financial position of the company and the results of the work done during the year. It also mentions the state of the company's assets and the results of the work done by the management.

6. The sixth part of the report deals with the management of the company and the measures taken to improve its efficiency. It also mentions the results of the work done by the management and the state of the company's affairs.

7. The seventh part of the report discusses the financial position of the company and the results of the work done during the year. It also mentions the state of the company's assets and the results of the work done by the management.

8. The eighth part of the report deals with the management of the company and the measures taken to improve its efficiency. It also mentions the results of the work done by the management and the state of the company's affairs.

9. The ninth part of the report discusses the financial position of the company and the results of the work done during the year. It also mentions the state of the company's assets and the results of the work done by the management.

10. The tenth part of the report deals with the management of the company and the measures taken to improve its efficiency. It also mentions the results of the work done by the management and the state of the company's affairs.

oestrus spotting. From still-surviving Stone Age cultures it is recorded that the women weave or fashion clothes, slings for their babies, and rough bags to carry what they gather. There is further evidence of the use of leaves, as menstrual pads, in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. "There were, of course, no sanitary napkins, or even newspapers, and the girls used large leaves - burdock - if they could find them, to protect themselves. Because any blood showing on a dress meant death; it was unaesthetic, and the S.S. were very keen on aesthetics".<sup>3</sup>

Even today both Maori and Eskimo women contrive pads of soft fine moss. The Azimba women of Central Africa use vegetable fibre to form pads, which are held in place by an oval sling of soft goat skin fastened to a belt of twisted thong.<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the women capable of bringing the infant human race forward into the future could also have found the way to deal efficiently with their own bodies.

### **Examples of Ancient Tampons**

There is also evidence that women made their own tampons. Many centuries before Christ, the ancient Egyptians fashioned disposable tampons from softened papyrus. The Greek physician Hippocrates, writing in the fifth century B.C., described another type of tampon, which was made of lint wrapped around a light weight wood. Elsewhere, women improvised from the materials at hand: in Rome it was wool; in Japan, paper; in Indonesia women made (and still do) tampon-type balls of a soft vegetable fibre: in Equatorial Africa they use rolls of grass.<sup>5</sup>

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem.

2. The second part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a single particle.

3. The third part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

4. The fourth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

5. The fifth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

6. The sixth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

7. The seventh part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

8. The eighth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

9. The ninth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

10. The tenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

11. The eleventh part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

12. The twelfth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

13. The thirteenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

14. The fourteenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

15. The fifteenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

16. The sixteenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

17. The seventeenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

18. The eighteenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

19. The nineteenth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

20. The twentieth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

21. The twenty-first part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

22. The twenty-second part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

23. The twenty-third part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

24. The twenty-fourth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

25. The twenty-fifth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

26. The twenty-sixth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

27. The twenty-seventh part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

28. The twenty-eighth part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case of a system of particles.

### Bleeding onto Clothing

Throughout history due to religion, customs and traditions, women have changed their way of dealing with menstrual blood. Before 1900 it was not customary to wash regularly. "Common people in former times lived in filth, did not wash themselves and were afflicted with life long infections and infestations of the skin, the ears, the eyes and the hair."<sup>6</sup> The face, neck, arms and feet were the only parts of the body to be washed and it was considered sinful and improper to wash or cleanse the private parts. Shorter<sup>7</sup>, has found evidence that "women from the popular classes menstruated onto their clothes". He cites the example of an incident in Frankfurt, in 1457, when a dead woman was disrobed despite the fact that from her clothing it was obvious that she had been menstruating before she died. Even in the early twentieth century Finnish country folk believed it to be very harmful to wear pads during menstruation, "because women are cleansed of evil and dirt during their monthlies; so that the cleaning will be unimpeded, the genitals must not be stopped up with cloth or pad". The cloths onto which a woman had bled, "must be washed in secret and only in a bit of water". Even in more advanced areas of Europe like Switzerland, the custom of letting the menses flow unhampered persisted until quite recently. Apart from the smell, all this dried blood caked either on clothes or in folds of skin would have provided excellent growth for micro organisms resulting in infection. So this would appear to be a most impractical way of dealing with menstruation.



### Cloth Pads

Throughout history women who have chosen to use sanitary wear have been wearing nappy like external pads. These pads were made of rags or cloth. An example of an external cloth pad can be seen in the film "An Angle At My Table" set in the 1940's <sup>New Zealand</sup> Australia. In the film the main character has her first period, and she is given a large bulky pad of folded terry cloth by her mother. It is placed in her under wear and fastened to the back and front of her vest using pins. Rags were disposed of after use but some cloth pads were washed for reuse. In Ireland these types of pads were widely used until the 1950's.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRST COMMERCIAL SANITARY WEAR

#### The First Disposable Pads

Disposable external pads became available four decades before tampons. In 1896, Johnson and Johnson introduced to American consumers a disposable pad of gauze-covered cotton. "They cost the same price as a pair of shoes".<sup>1</sup> Because of this and the absence of extensive advertising necessary for a new product, sales languished and they soon disappeared from the market.

The disposable pad as we know it today was first designed and popularised in the 1920s. During World War I, when cotton was scarce, a manufacturer of surgical dressings, Kimberly and Clark, turned to a wood pulp derivative called alpha cellulose. Nurses working at military hospitals and first aid stations discovered a new application for this dressing and began to improvise pads from it. They found the pads absorbed menstrual flow more efficiently than their cloth nappies. The manufacturer, later renamed Kimberly - Clark observed this, and in 1920 marketed Kotex. The large number of nurses returning from the war who had tried the disposable pads, were able to recommend them and soon they became popular with other women. These "sanitary napkins" began to replace home made pads.



The first Kimberly and Clark towel consisted of several layers of wadding cut into a rectangular shape and wrapped in gauze. It was advertised as a disposable sanitary napkin, made of cellulose wadding that was five times more absorbent than cotton. Absorbency was the great advantage and early advertising carried this message. "The initial product was very crude but it performed admirably nonetheless." 2

Kimberly - Clark could see the large potential market for Kotex but advertising presented a problem. A considerable hush-hush attitude prevailed about the entire subject of menstruation. Magazines were reluctant to place advertisements and stores felt the product, placed on display, would displease female customers and even embarrass them. Despite the lack of marketing and retail price of \$0.60 for 5 towels, sales soared. The breakthrough for Kotex came in 1925, when Carson Pirie Scott, a Chicago department store with a quality image, began to intensely promote Kotex towels. The following year advertisements appeared in national women's magazines, where the customer could read in private. By the thirties, advertisements were appearing in most national magazines and daily news papers.

The sanitary towel market grew rapidly during the twenties and thirties, in 1939 only 20% of the potential market continued using home made towels. With the arrival of World War II, tens of thousands of women went from being housewives into military service. Millions of other women went into factories where they took over such traditional male occupations as welding, operating cranes and running machines. Others served in

...the ... of ...  
...the ... of ...  
...the ... of ...  
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...  
...the ... of ...  
...the ... of ...  
...the ... of ...

voluntary posts as nurse's aids for the Red Cross or as ambulance drivers for Civilian Defence. Disposable towels were more convenient, and despite war shortages Kimberly-Clark, saw to it that all war plants were well equipped with vending machines for their towels. By 1947, consumer usage in the USA approached 100%.

It was not until after the war that Kimberly-Clark research indicated that "anatomical differences should be taken into consideration",<sup>2</sup> and they introduced Kotex Slenderline and Kotex Miss Deb, for women and girls with lighter flow. Their "instant success" illustrates the market need. Research results also showed that one woman out of four wore two towels at one time at some point during their menstrual period, and in 1968, this gap in the market was met by the introduction of Kotex Plus.



## The Invention of Tampons

While manufacturers marketed commercial pads during the 1920s, the idea of the tampon persisted in other realms. For more than a century, physicians had been using improvised plugs of cotton to absorb secretions in surgery and to apply antiseptics in the vagina or to staunch haemorrhaging there. It was, in fact, a physician who thought of taking the tampon beyond improvisation. Beginning in 1929, Dr. Earle Cleveland Haas, a general practitioner attempted to invent a product that could be manufactured and marketed specifically for absorbing the menstrual flow.

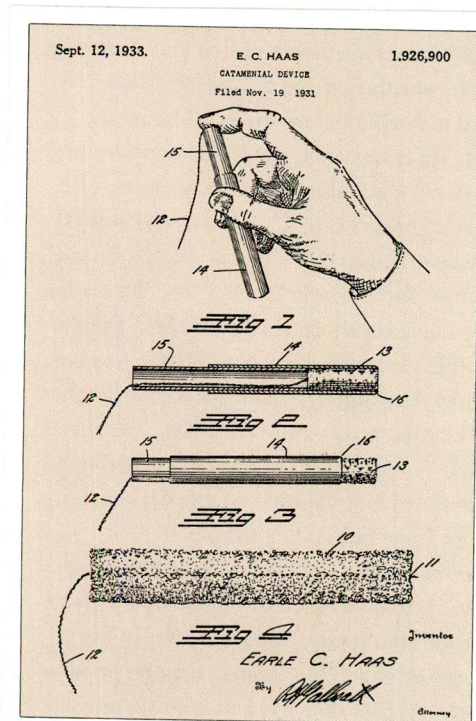
Dr. Haas spent much of his spare time developing the tampon. His inspiration came not from knowledge of the homemade tampons used by women since antiquity but from observing the discomfort his wife and female patients endured through the use of bulky external pads. Haas used cotton compressed into a small, highly absorbent cylinder with a cord for removal. He wanted the women to be able to insert it without touching it. First, he thought of a metal applicator, but then settled on the idea of a telescoping arrangement of a pair of paper-wound tubes. He made one tube slightly longer than the other to hold the tampon. Pushing on the smaller tube would push the tampon into place. Made of paper this apparatus was then disposable.

All of this was set down in the application for the first of his tampon patents, which he filed in 1931, calling it 'a catamenial device' - from a term for the menses that, in turn, derived from a Greek word meaning "monthly."



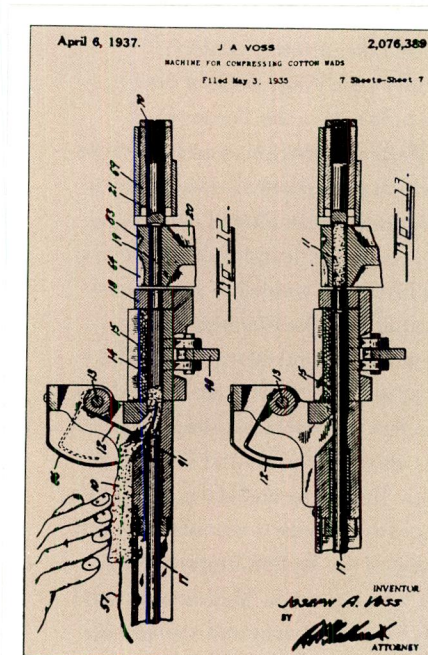
## Plate 1.

The oldest known depiction of the Tampax tampon, submitted as part of the documentation in applying for the first tampon patents.



## Plate 2.

Hand operated compressor designed by Dr. Haas.





The name Tampax was coined by Dr. Haas. Tampon is a medical term for “a plug of cotton or other material inserted into a wound or orifice to control haemorrhage. etc.”<sup>3</sup> Dr. Haas liked the sound of Kotex, the name established by Kimberly -Clark for disposable towels and was looking for “a word that would be easy to think of and of an outstanding sound, it would be half the battle.”<sup>4</sup> According to historical information from Tambrands Ltd., by combining the words ‘tampon’ and ‘vaginal pack’ he came up with Tampax. However, it seems more likely that he simply derived the word by combining ‘tampon’ and ‘Kotex’. It was nearly two years before the patent was granted in 1933. Meanwhile, Dr. Haas continued to test Tampax on his wife, and on the nurses to whom he sent samples at hospitals throughout the United States.

### **Production of Tampons**

It was the middle of the Depression when Haas undertook the difficult task of trying to find investors and a manufacturer for his product. In 1933 he sold his patent to the Tenderich Group, headed by Gertrude Tenderich. She produced the company’s first tampons herself at home. It was a tedious process, involving an ordinary sewing machine and a hand operated compressor (plate 2). Eventually the company moved to new premises and production was speeded up by the introduction of an automatic compressor.



## The Marketing of Tampons

Tenderich hired salesmen and set about persuading chemists in Colorado and neighbouring Wyoming to stock tampons. The salesmen ran into immediate resistance. Some pharmacists feared that displaying the blue-and-white Tampax cartons on their shelves would offend their customers and insisted on hiding them behind the counter. Others refused to stock them at all, until the company created a consumer demand for them. And most newspapers refused to accept the advertising that Tenderich hoped would create that demand.

It was difficult to get chemists to stock tampons and it was a harder task to get magazines and newspapers to carry the advertisements, but arguably the greatest hurdle was getting women to use tampons. Although there are examples in the past of women fashioning their own tampons, women of the 1930s were unfamiliar with the idea of internal sanitary wear. Additionally, people are automatically suspicious of new products. For example, when underground transport was first invented, people were afraid to travel on the trains. Travelling underground was against their natural instincts and many believed it would bring them down towards hell. Similarly, women were hesitant to try to insert tampons. 'Foreign body' is a medical term used to describe something that is not naturally in the body. Examples of foreign bodies are, a splinter, a piece of grit or a transplanted organ. A tampon is essentially a foreign body. It is contrary to our natural instincts to insert some thing 'foreign' into our own bodies, as a result women have an initial psychological barrier to using tampons.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem.

2. In the second part, we shall consider the case of a single particle.

3. The third part is devoted to the case of a system of particles.

4. In the fourth part, we shall consider the case of a continuous medium.

5. The fifth part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

6. In the sixth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

7. The seventh part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

8. In the eighth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

9. The ninth part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

10. In the tenth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

11. The eleventh part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

12. In the twelfth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

13. The thirteenth part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

14. In the fourteenth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

15. The fifteenth part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

16. In the sixteenth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

17. The seventeenth part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

18. In the eighteenth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

19. The nineteenth part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

20. In the twentieth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

21. The twenty-first part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

22. In the twenty-second part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

23. The twenty-third part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

24. In the twenty-fourth part, we shall consider the case of a single continuous medium.

25. The twenty-fifth part is devoted to the case of a system of continuous media.

Women's fears were heightened by the myths that developed surrounding the use of tampons. Some representatives of organised religion denounced them in print and from the pulpit. Some Roman Catholic priests preached that, tampons destroy the physical evidence of virginity and that they provide a stimulus for masturbation. These fears persisted and in 1945, thirty years before cigarettes had to carry a warning, the General Medical Council made every tampon box carry the following warning:

Tampax is not suitable for all women,  
unmarried and young girls should only use  
on advice of a doctor.

This health warning was not lifted till 1956.

Tampax had a difficult marketing campaign ahead of them. They had to introduce women to a totally new concept, which dealt with a very personal part of their lives and bodies. It was important that the marketing campaign would not be imposing or cause embarrassment. It targeted three groups - doctors, who would be able to recommend tampons, the chemists, who would stock them, and consumers. At this stage advertisements for tampons were not accepted in publications, so Tenderich placed 'blind ads' in which women were invited to write for information. They also launched an innovative educational campaign. Registered nurses were commissioned to give public lectures on menstruation and tampons. Crews of women were hired to go door to door through residential neighbourhoods, to talk to housewives. This was a very successful marketing strategy. Nurses were able to give women the reassurance they needed about the product, and door to door sales women were able to address women as individuals, in private.



## Plate 3.

The first magazine advertisement for Tampax.

The American Weekly, July 26, 1936

# WELCOME THIS NEW DAY FOR WOMANHOOD

This summer you can experience a comfort and an assurance of daintiness you have never known before



*Tampax eliminates chafing, odor and embarrassment, because protection is complete and internal. Tampax provides daintiness at all times.*

## SANITARY PROTECTION WORN INTERNALLY

IT SEEMS too good, too impossible to be true. But ...at last...a method of sanitary protection has been perfected that enables you to be completely free of embarrassment...completely comfortable...completely sure of safe protection.

Tampax eliminates the external sanitary pad entirely. It is known to the medical profession as a tampon. Small, compressed, highly absorbent, made of surgical cotton, *Tampax is worn internally.*

Your doctor will be the first to tell you that Tampax is the most natural and the most hygienic method of sanitary protection...accepted for advertising by the American Medical Association.

Thousands of women have already tried Tampax and would no sooner go back to the old-fashioned napkin than they would to the methods in use fifteen years ago.

Tampax is quite simple to use and it provides a freedom and daintiness never before possible. No belts. No pins. No pads. No chafing. No binding. Tampax eliminates odor because it prevents its formation. Tampax provides complete sanitary protection...safe at all times. It stays in place, through the most strenuous sports, yet it can be removed in a moment's time. And you are totally unconscious of it.

A month's supply of Tampax comes in a purse-size package. You can buy it at drug and department stores everywhere. Complete instructions for use are included. **PACKAGE OF TEN 35¢**



*Tampax is sure. It stays in place through your exercise seasonally, yet it can be removed in a moment's time.*

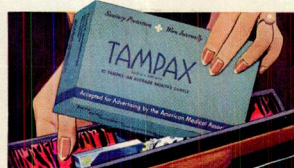
### Exclusive Advantages of Tampax

Each Tampax is enclosed in a convenient and patented applicator, sealed in an individual wrapper. The fingers never touch the cotton. Easier to use, daintiness is always assured, and there is no chafing about effective protection and comfort.

Tampax causes no discomfort. It is made of specially compressed, highly absorbent, long-fibered surgical cotton. Though very small when inserted, on contact with moisture it gently expands so that, although you are completely unconscious of it, one Tampax will absorb one to two ounces, the equivalent of a third of a glass of water.



*Tampax is completely invisible, for it is worn internally.*



**FOR PHYSICIANS:** You have probably read about Tampax in the medical journals or in *Complete Protection* sent to you through your hospital or some other source. If, however, you would like to know more about Tampax, we will gladly send you literature and information as described in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Address: Tampax Incorporated, New Brunswick, N. J.

**IF YOUR LOCAL STORE HAS NOT YET STOCKED TAMPAX:** TAMPAX INCORPORATED, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

( ) Please send me the regular size package of Tampax. Enclosed is \$1.00 (quantity or none).

( ) Please send me a FREE booklet describing Tampax in detail.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ACCEPTED FOR ADVERTISING BY THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



In 1936 (plate 3) the first magazine advertisement appeared. It was not in a woman's magazine, as would be expected today, but in American Weekly, a Sunday supplement that was inserted into many major newspapers. The visual themes, together with those developed in the text were concepts which prevailed in the company advertising for the next fifty years. The illustration features a young, healthy looking woman, enjoying physical hobbies such as playing tennis, riding horses and swimming. "Welcome This New Day For Womanhood" was the title slogan, and in smaller type the benefits of tampons compared to sanitary towels were outlined, "you can experience a comfort and an assurance of daintiness you have never known before". After the success of their first advertisements similar advertisements soon appeared in other Sunday supplements and eventually women's magazines.

### Tampax and Changing Lifestyle

The sales of Tampax grew slowly at first, but then there was an explosive growth in sales brought on by the war. One reason for this growth was the unprecedented wartime prosperity: after a decade of simply trying to make ends meet more people had a disposable income. But sales also soared because the lives of women changed radically. The common ingredient in almost all of these changes was physical activity outside the home. These were the active women that Tampax had long targeted in their advertising, but they were not partaking in the leisure activities portrayed in the magazine advertisements. Advertising responded to these changes, Tampax new chemist displays portrayed, instead of a swimmer, a woman in the uniform of the Woman's Army Corps, along with the slogan, "No time for



‘time-out’.” Women found tampons more convenient than the existing ‘sanitary napkins’ for their new lifestyles, as they were smaller and therefore easier to carry in purses and easier to dispose of. Women were also assured that whatever they were doing there would be no embarrassing smell or leakage.

### **Medical Tests of Tampons**

“Accepted for Advertising by the American Medical Association,” was printed on all Tampax Incorporated company stationary and on Tampax cartons. According to Ellery Mann the then promoter and stock holder in Tampax Incorporated, “it added an ethical as well as a medical background to the product”.<sup>5</sup> Although the statement was factual, it gave the impression that Tampax had been tested by professionals. In fact, Tampax had never been tested by independent doctors under controlled conditions. The slogan was dropped in 1943 at the urging of the Federal Trade Commission. “Mann and his colleagues always had felt certain that their new product was medically safe as well as effective and said so,”<sup>5</sup> even though scientific research into tampons was virtually nonexistent. But it was not until 1939 that studies by researchers and physicians began to appear in medical journals.

The first medical study by Dr., Harry S. Sackerin, published in the August 1939 issue of Clinical Medicine and Surgery, observed twenty women using Tampax tampons over a duration of three to five months. His conclusions were all favourable, that these tampons:



1. Offered complete protection to over 90% of women observed.
2. Showed no tendency to block the flow.
3. Produced no observable changes in the vaginal or cervical tissues.
4. Caused no infections.
5. Were easy and comfortable to use and eliminated odour.
6. Were favourably regarded by the patient.

These studies were not thorough, as they did not include a large enough sample group of women and tests were not continued over a long period of time. In 1941, Madeline J. Thornton, M.D., of the University of Wisconsin Medical School, completed a study of 110 subjects over periods of time ranging from one to two years. An even more extensive study was completed in 1943 by Karl J. Karnaky, M.D., a research gynaecologist at Jefferson Davis Hospital in Houston. Over a five-year period he observed in close detail 42 subjects who were normal in physiological and menstrual function. He also studied in briefer durations the effects of tampon use in 2,298 other subjects. The findings of both Thornton and Karnaky confirmed earlier favourable results.

Such reports gave impressive credibility to the work of Tampax's educational department. Increasingly, materials prepared by the department were incorporated into health classes at the college level and eventually in public secondary and elementary schools. Old myths about the morality of tampons were buried under the weight of medical research. The incompleteness of these tests came to light in the 1980s, forty-four years after Tampax was first marketed, when the use of tampons was linked with Toxic Shock Syndrome.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **PROBLEMS WITH EXISTING SANITARY WEAR.**

Although we encounter problems with the every day use of existing sanitary wear, such as discomfort and lack of disposal facilities, the use of commercial, disposable products also leads to more critical problems. These are, health risks and the environmental consequences of large scale manufacture and use.

### **HEALTH RISKS**

#### **Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturers**

There are no legal safeguards governing the manufacturing or labelling of sanitary products; only a voluntary agreement which exists between the Department of Health, Department of Trade and The Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturers, (ASPM). "The ASPM represents some of the companies in the United Kingdom which manufacture and market feminine hygiene products, namely towels, tampons and panty liners. The member companies, are determined that their industry should be responsible, competitive, environmentally conscious, innovative and dynamic and are constantly working to achieve this." The ASPM produces a Code of Practice (Appendix III), which provides guidelines on such matters as good manufacturing practice, product safety, product packaging and product disposability. The powers of the ASPM are limited, because they produce guidelines and membership is voluntary. The majority of manufacturers are members, except for Tambrands Ltd., who are the leading tampon manufacturers.

1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is a summary of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

2. The second part of the report deals with the specific work done during the year. It is a detailed statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a detailed statement of the work done and the results obtained.

3. The third part of the report deals with the financial statement of the year. It is a statement of the income and expenditure of the year. It is a statement of the income and expenditure of the year.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

5. The fifth part of the report deals with the general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

6. The sixth part of the report deals with the general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

7. The seventh part of the report deals with the general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

8. The eighth part of the report deals with the general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

9. The ninth part of the report deals with the general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

10. The tenth part of the report deals with the general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained. It is a general statement of the work done and the results obtained.

### **Tampon Health Risks**

Women have been using commercial tampons since their invention in the 1920's. Tampons provided women with 'freedom' as a convenient product. Women gained a similar 'freedom' from their bodies in the fifties when contraceptive pills became widely available. Like contraceptive pills, the potential dangers of using tampons have only come to light in recent years. Until the association of tampons with Toxic Shock Syndrome, (TSS), in the 1980s, there had been no mention of any side effects of using tampons. There has still been very little research into the health risks involved in the use of tampons.

### **Possible Health Risks**

Since 1918, it has been known that toxins can be absorbed through the vagina. However, little is known about the possible health effects of dioxin and pesticide residues in tampons. Experts have voiced concern about the possible links between dioxin residues and uterine cancer. As of yet, no British tampon manufacturer has released the results of pesticide residue tests.

### **Proven Health Risks**

Tampons are efficient at their task of absorbing liquid. They absorb about 65% menstrual blood and 35% other vaginal secretions. This causes vaginal dryness which can lead to epithelial layering (peeling of the mucous membrane). Up to one in five tampon users may suffer from micro-ulcerations. This appears to be a transient effect, which heals between monthly periods, but little is known about the long term effects of



recurring damage. Micro-ulceration can develop into vaginal ulcers and can increase bleeding. Prolonged tampon use and higher absorbencies increase the risk of ulceration and up to 75% of women experience some form of alteration of the mucous membrane. Fibres shed from tampons have been found incorporated in vaginal walls.

### **Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)**

Tampon-related TSS was first made public in the USA in 1980. The disease is related to tampon absorbency, although all brands and sizes pose a risk. TSS is caused by a toxin known as TSST-1 which is produced by a strain of the normally harmless bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus*, occurring in about 30% of the population at one time. It is naturally found in warm moist parts of the body, including the vagina. The precise mechanism of the onset of TSS is not fully understood, but tampon use causes a variety of changes to the vagina which can create a biological environment encouraging the production of TSST-1.

TSS is not a notifiable disease in the UK or Ireland, so no reliable statistics exist. Information from the Public Health Laboratory Service indicates that there may be about twenty full-blown cases a year in the UK. To meet the case definition criteria for TSS, women have to be critically ill, so milder cases or those treated quickly are never included in these statistics.

The symptoms of TSS are flu-like. The acute phase starts with rapid loss of blood pressure, and respiratory failure. It affects all of the body's major organ systems. Necrosis, a decay of cells caused by poor blood supply, can

1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is a summary of the work done and a statement of the results achieved. It is a statement of the work done and a statement of the results achieved.

2. The second part of the report deals with the work done during the year. It is a summary of the work done and a statement of the results achieved. It is a statement of the work done and a statement of the results achieved.

3. The third part of the report deals with the work done during the year. It is a summary of the work done and a statement of the results achieved. It is a statement of the work done and a statement of the results achieved.

cause the loss of fingers, toes and limbs. The short term after effects almost always include hair loss, fingernail and toenail loss, shedding of skin, double vision, headaches and a loss of memory. Some women never recover completely, and are left suffering with deafness, arthritis and other health problems. At least 12 women in the UK have died from tampon related TSS since 1978, and nearly 200 are known to have survived the disease.

Since 1980, a warning about TSS has been included in the leaflets which come with tampon packs. In 1993, all tampon manufacturers started to carry an on-pack warning about TSS. However, some print this on the cellophane wrapper, which is thrown away. As previously stated, TSS is related to tampon absorbency. Each brand comes in a range of absorbencies - regular, super and so on - but there is no consistent definition, so regular tampons of different brands can have different absorbencies. A survey by Which? magazine<sup>1</sup> concludes "We would like to see standardised absorbency ranges, measured by methods which reflect real-life use. Only then can we be sure that regular and super mean the same every time you buy a tampon". The absorbency of towels, is not a health risk but again there is no standardised test or accepted way to compare absorbencies.



## ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

### Disposal

Problems with disposal have existed since the invention of commercial sanitary wear. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir wrote "The pads sold by chemists are thrown away after one use; but on trips, visits or excursions it is not so easy to get rid of them, especially when disposal in the lavatory is expressly forbidden."<sup>2</sup>

Up until the late 1970s, public toilets contained incinerators (plate 4) where sanitary towels were burnt individually. This appears to be an extreme measure, for disposal, and it signifies the unhygienic, dangerous qualities which are attributed to menstrual blood. The large mains powered unit was located in the wash hand basin area, and did not always function smoothly. "The disposal unit signalled your exit from the loo with bouts of black smoke, or was stuffed full, leaving you with a reeking packet and nowhere to put it."<sup>3</sup>

The Public Health Act 1936 forbids the disposal in the sewerage system of any article which might block the flow.<sup>4</sup> Seventy five per cent of blocked drains are caused by sanitary products.<sup>5</sup> Approximately half a billion sanitary towels and tampons a year are allowed to pass into the sea almost completely untreated. It can take six months for tampons to biodegrade in the sea and the plastic liners and strips from sanitary towels remain in the environment indefinitely. As a result, this waste is washed up on beaches causing visible pollution and harming wildlife.



Plate 4.

Incinerator unit for sanitary towel disposal in public toilets.



Used towel placed  
in tray.

Drawer for  
removing ashes.



Some sanitary product labelling gives instructions to dispose of by flushing. As a result of pressure to change disposal instructions, most manufacturers have recognised the problems caused by flushing and are now recommending disposal through household waste, for example, Procter & Gamble now endorse dustbin disposal on the packaging of Always products.

The Law states that wherever ten or more women are employed or catered for, suitable provisions must be made for the disposal of sanitary products. The majority of public toilets have chemical type disposal units (plate 5.) located beside toilets. These units are rented to an establishment by an independent company, which also empties and maintains them. This simple service does not always work efficiently. The adhesive backing on the towels tends to stick to the lid of the unit. They are sometimes full or overflowing, and often there is not enough space between the toilet and the wall for the unit.

Disposal bags (plate 6) were once commonly used for sanitary wear disposal, and they can still be found hanging on the inside door of some older establishments. Once sanitary wear is in the bag, it can be placed in a disposal unit or bin. This waste goes directly to landfill preventing sanitary wear getting into the water system. The Irish Women's Environmental Network are encouraging the use of disposal bags as part of their "binning" campaign. The bags (plate 7), which are sold in batches and are made from recycled paper.



Plate 5.

Sanitary wear disposal unit for public toilets.





Plate 6.

Disposal bags.

Disposal Bag



HYGIENIC PRODUCTS (IR

Telephone: Dublin 743581/746264/74

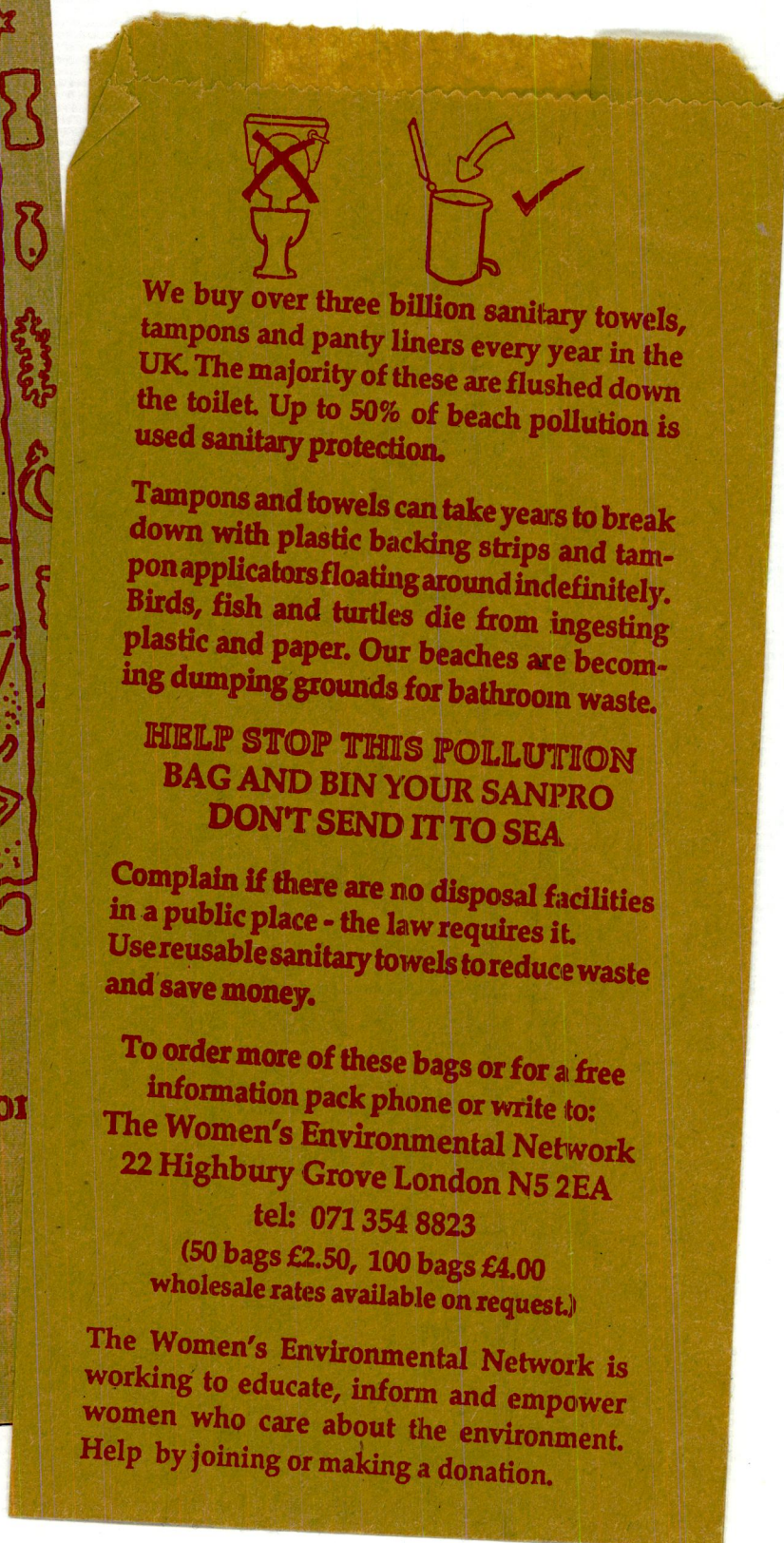


SMITH & NEPHEW SOUTHALLS (IRL.) LTD.  
KILL O' THE GRANGE,  
DUN LAOGHAIRE, CO. DUBLIN.



Plate 7.

Disposal bags from Women's Environmental Network.





### Domestic Disposal

Domestic disposal is made more difficult by the secrecy surrounding menstruation, which women feel that they have to maintain. "Day and night she must think of making her changes, must keep watch of her underwear, her sheets, must solve a thousand little practical and repugnant problems."<sup>6</sup> Prior to the invention of the washing machine, washing was one of the main disadvantages of reusable cloth pads. "In economical families the sanitary napkins are washed each month and put back with clean handkerchiefs; she must put these excreta from herself in the hands of whoever does the washing - laundress, maid, mother or older sister."<sup>7</sup>

The hearth fire was once the chief means of household waste disposal and the centre of family activity, this made it difficult for women to burn used pads. Even today there is still uncertainty on how best to dispose of sanitary wear in the domestic setting. Flushing waste is most convenient but it is not good for the environment. So used products should be disposed of with all other domestic waste, but this is often difficult when toilets do not contain a bin, or a bin without a lid.



## CHAPTER IV

### TABOO

Suicide, AIDS, and incest are taboo subjects. These areas have the “prohibition imposed by social customs”(OED) and people who are associated with them may have to endure “ritual isolation”(OED). Menstruation is a natural phenomenon, which is a healthy function of the female body and bears no relation to the subjects it is grouped with. But menstruation is the original taboo subject. The word taboo originates from the Polynesian verb, ‘taboer’, which was used to describe the sacred and magical qualities of the menstrual cycle. Although taboos still exist on other subjects, there has been a public campaign to remove them, for example, AIDS and child abuse have been brought into the open in an effort to educate people. There has been no comparable effort to lift the taboos which surround menstruation.

#### 20th Century Taboos

In our society there is a vague shame and secrecy attached to the subject of menstruation. Women tend to focus on the negative aspects of menstruation: it hurts, it is messy, the cramps and the premenstrual syndrome. “For a woman, the taboo acts as a constant confirmation of negative self image. It represents the source of shame that she feels about her body and her sexuality.”<sup>1</sup> Modern menstrual taboos can be implicit or explicit; in our society, the taboo itself is a mere twitch, a cringe of discomfort, an embarrassment when we pay for sanitary wear at a cash desk. The Wise Wound describes ancient times when women were treated



as goddesses and menstruation was considered sacred. According to Jeannette Kupfermann author of The Ms Taken Body in other cultures, there are positive aspects to existing taboos, "The taboo is many things, not just a device to make women feel unclean - it is among other things a protective device, a device which safe guards cherished categories in the universe".<sup>2</sup> She cites experience of Hasidic women and Orthodox Jewish women who enjoy obeying Purity Laws<sup>3</sup> and ritual baths every month. "They have a distinct ritual which gives them a common focus for sharing experience, and powerful symbols for renewal."<sup>4</sup> According to Kupfermann, other women, "are impoverished by our lack of ritual". But buying sanitary wear, storing it, using it, and disposing of it, is a ritual in itself, the only difference is the unease in which we go about it. Removing the unease we feel about menstruation could be the first step to making our current mundane ritual, a celebration.

Menstrual blood does not quite fit any classification. There is debate as to the actual function of menstruation, whether it is part of reproduction or the body cleansing itself of toxins each month. It is thick and sticky - something between solid and liquid - that, too, adds to its lack of definition, its 'dangerous', unclassifiable quality.

Mary Douglas<sup>5</sup> distinguishes non polluting body fluids from those which defile. Tears and semen are examples of non polluting body fluids. Menstruation is part of the 'polluting body', which includes mucus, sweat, excrement, childbirth, etc. Grouping menstrual blood and excrement is self significant insofar as menstrual blood becomes associated with the



characteristics of excrement. As a result menstrual flow is not only regarded with shame and embarrassment but with the disgust suitable for something that has the power to contaminate.

There is little defined menstrual taboo, in fact there is very little recognition of menstruation altogether. It has been made invisible by tampons which mean that women do not have to look at their blood, and the contraceptive pill which reduces menstrual flow. Modern menstrual taboos are difficult to identify directly. Women no longer undergo ancient taboos, such as confinement to menstrual huts. Myths such as "you can't wash your hair" when menstruating have almost disappeared. Modern taboos persist through sanitary wear. Embarrassment is caused by the mere presence of sanitary products, such as when buying towels or tampons. The unattractiveness of the products themselves, and the white colour implying the hygiene necessary for a bandage for a wound, contribute to their poor image. Sanitary wear is either regarded with humour or disgust. And according to feminist writers Ann Treneman and Anne McLear it is sanitary wear advertisements which perpetuate the taboos.



# MARKETING

## Advertising

By their very existence menstrual adverts appear to break the taboo upon which they rely to sell their products. "But while the ads do break the silence surrounding menstruation, they are promoting and constructed in such a way that the very thing that they are breaking ultimately remains intact".<sup>6</sup> This is the argument put forward by Ann Treneman in Cashing in on the Curse and Anne McLear in her paper "How sanitary wear advertising is used in a tool in the oppression of women."

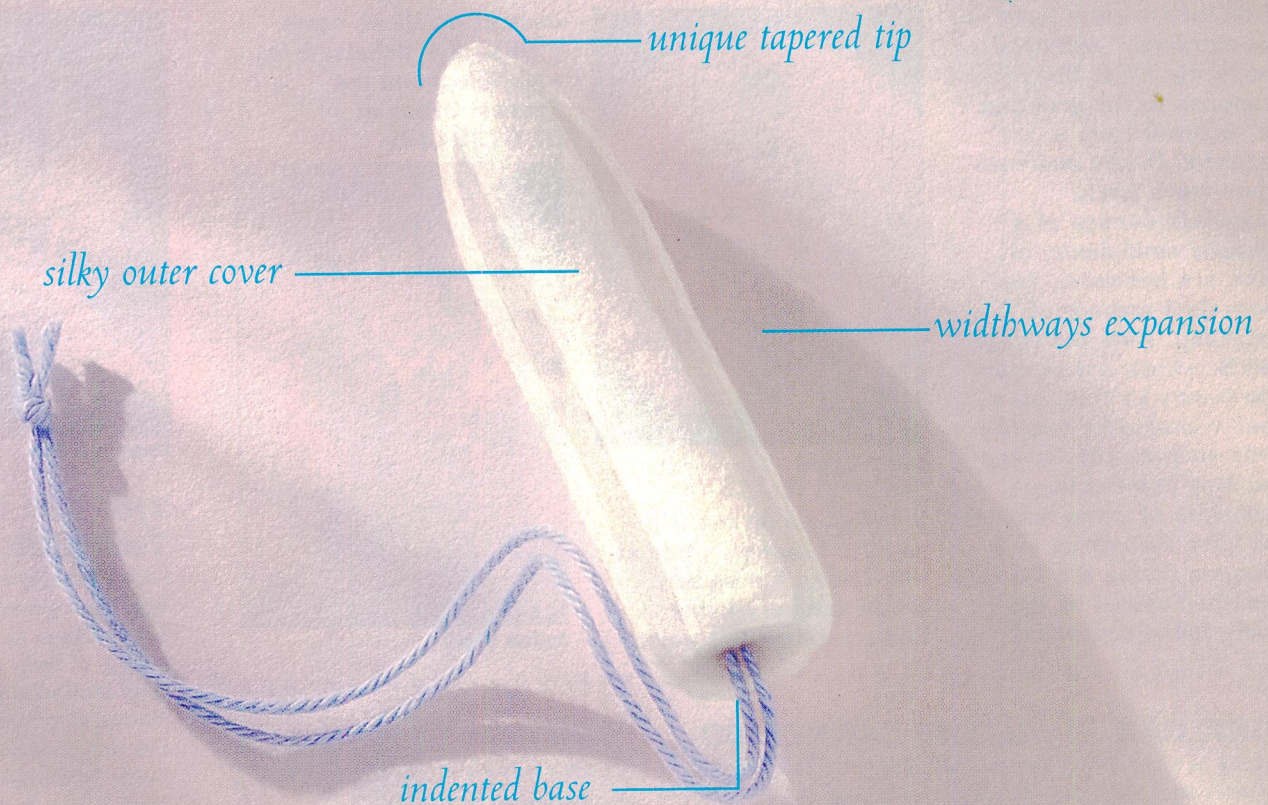
The first television advertisement for sanitary wear was broadcast in 1972. It was for Lil-Lets and would very easily meet with today's standards of taste and decency. The advertisements portrayed a young, fashionable, blond woman striding towards her car. As she takes her sunglasses out of her purse we glimpse a box of Lil-Lets. Due to the number of complaints received, the advert was removed after three months and there were no more sanitary wear advertisements broadcasts for the next ten years.

The 1972 Lil-Let advert has a female voice over and meets all of the present guidelines.<sup>7</sup> The major difference between this advertisement and current advertisements is that the product was shown in its box. Before 1991, these products could not be shown without their wrapper. Plate 8 is a recent magazine advertisement depicting an unwrapped product. Sanitary wear has been promoted unwrapped in other more open minded European countries, for example Holland, since the 1980's.



Advertisement depicting an unwrapped product.

# A few pointers on why Tampets® are easier to use.



You told us you like your non-applicator tampons to be comfortable to use, so we created Tampets®. Each Tampets® has a unique gently tapered tip, a silky overwrap, and an indented base to make them easier to insert and place. So it makes using a non-applicator tampon more comfortable than ever before. Tampets® will also give you widthways expansion for total protection. So, make a point of trying Tampets®.



*Tampets®. For great comfort and protection.*



☒ Yes. I want to try Tampets. Please send me my free sample pack.

What do you use most often?

- ☐ Towels ☐ Applicator tampons  
☐ Non-applicator tampons

Do you use anything else?

- ☐ Towels ☐ Pantliners  
☐ Applicator tampons ☐ Non-applicator tampons

Your regular brand \_\_\_\_\_

Miss/Mrs./MS/Forename \_\_\_\_\_

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

ET53



The past few years have seen an increase in the number and style of sanitary wear advertisements. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, (ASAI), received eight complaints about sanitary wear advertisements during the past three years, all of which related to television and/or radio commercials. The reasons given for the complaints were that the products were considered unsuitable for TV/radio coverage and that the advertisements were offensive and embarrassing. Some complainants considered that the advertisements were broadcast at inappropriate times.

Radio Teilifis Eireann (RTE) are members of ASAI and all commercials carried by RTE must comply with the ASAI code and with RTE's own rules. The station has a Copy Clearance Committee consisting of both men and women who vet all television and radio advertisements to check that they meet the criteria of both the ASAI code and RTE's rules. This Committee also reviews commercials which are the subject of complaint. In the case of sanitary wear advertisements, special care is taken by RTE to ensure that they are "tastefully presented and that they are normally subjected to restricted time bands". So any embarrassment caused by these commercials is restricted along with other offensive material such as extreme violence, bad language and programmes of an adult nature (Appendix I, letter a).

So, why are the television advertisements the focus of so much attention, complaints and the cause of embarrassment? Women's magazines have been carrying sanitary wear advertisements for decades. These magazines,



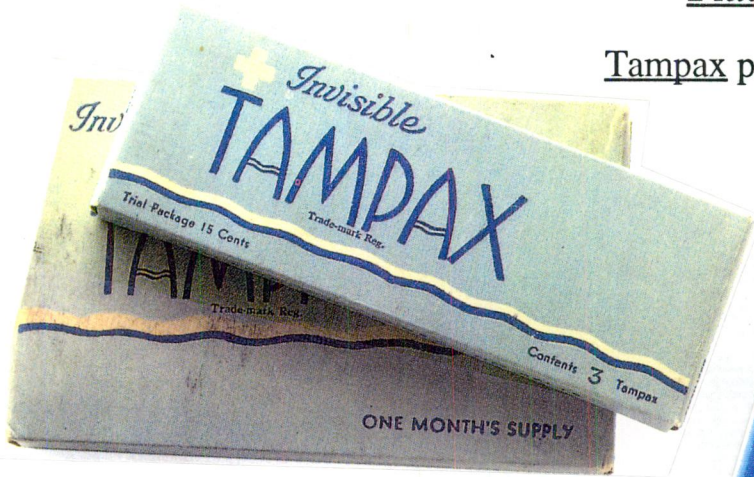
which vary from those with a teenage readership, (e.g. 19), middle class readership, (e.g. Vogue) or a working class readership, (e.g. Bella), all carry at least two advertisements in each issue, often restricted to the back pages. Where there is an intended male readership, magazines are unlikely to carry advertisements for sanitary wear. Hello! magazine took the decision not to carry sanitary wear advertisements. "This was because we wanted the advertising content of Hello! to reflect the editorial style, in that the magazine is all about the good things in life. Equally, we did not wish to alienate or discourage male readers." (Appendix I, letter b). Seventy four per cent of Hello! readers are women so this editorial policy prioritises the needs of its minority of male readers. It also implies that menstruation is not one of the good things in life.

Women's magazines are designed as a purely female medium. In them, women are confronted by the subject of sanitary wear in private. Therefore there are few complaints "because this is purely a women's medium and it is a women's product" (Appendix II, interview a). The reason that there are complaints when commercials containing the same information and similar style as magazine advertisements appear on television, is because they infringe on the male 'public sphere'. It is summed up by the opinion of Bob McMahon advertising editor of Woman's Way, who felt that "television is not the place for 'sanpro' ads" (Appendix II, interview b).

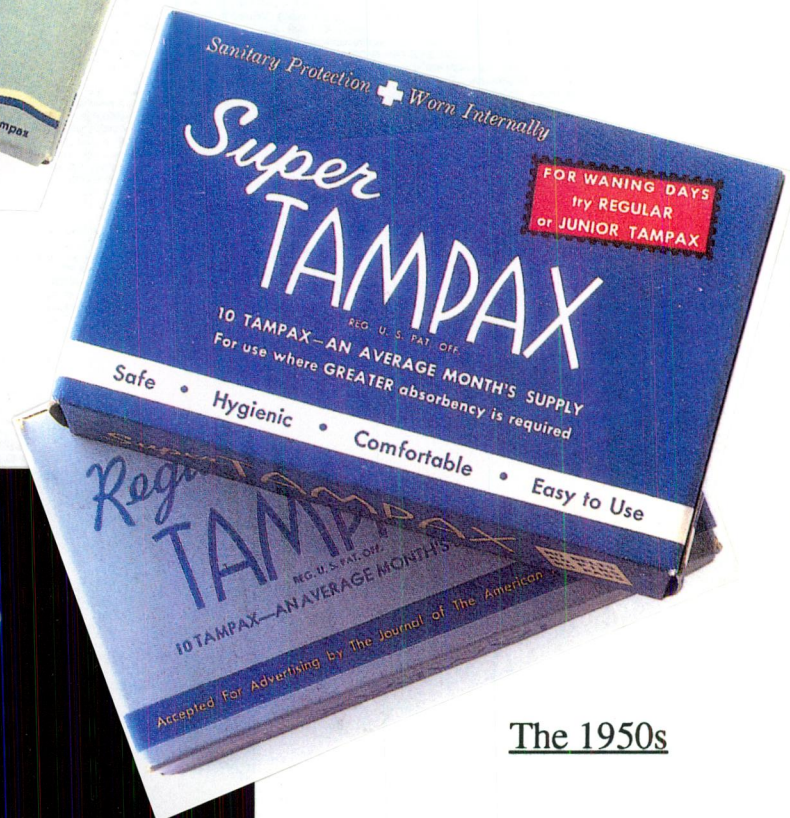


## Plate 9.

Tampax packaging.



The 1930s



The 1950s



The 1980s

1996

Handwritten text on three pieces of paper. The top right piece contains a few lines of text. The middle left piece contains several lines of text. The bottom right piece contains a larger block of text, possibly a letter or a report, with multiple lines of handwriting.

## Packaging

As I have said, American stores were initially resistant to display sanitary wear. Retailers often felt that women required sanitary wear to be wrapped so as to hide any embarrassment at the sales counter. Although companies were spending millions on advertising, shops continued to 'hide' the product. In Dublin, during the 1950s sanitary towels could only be purchased from chemists. They came in packs of approximately twelve and were wrapped in clear cellophane with no brand name or labelling. This package was placed into a plain brown paper bag before it was handed across the counter. As products were not stacked on shelves, choice was limited and products did not have to compete through packaging. Kimberly-Clark were the first manufacturers to treat sanitary towels like any other commodity item. Other manufacturers wrapped their products at the factory. Kimberly-Clark did not, they upgraded their packaging and styled it "towards femininity".

Menstrual blood is red. However, the most popular colour associated with sanitary products seems to be light blue. The instructions on how to insert Tampax and Lil-Lets are printed in this colour. Disposal units in public toilets and the lady on the front of disposal bags are blue. Johnson and Johnson broke new ground in sanitary wear advertising in 1990. To illustrate the absorbency of their Vespré towel they demonstrated it soaking up blue ink. Other sanitary wear brands followed suit by using blue coloured water to represent menstrual blood in their advertisements. "Of all human substances, blood is the most highly charged with power and



danger. Menstruation is mysterious blood, dangerous, unclean and threatening.”<sup>8</sup> Red symbolises danger, power and passion, it is a difficult colour to overlook. Pale blue is associated with the gentle femininity of The Virgin Mary and with hygiene. It is a relaxing, subtle colour but most importantly it is discreet.

Until recently sanitary wear was commonly packaged in pastel colours similar to those of cosmetic products, for example, Tampax packaging from the 1920s to the present day (plate 9). According to design consultants Lewis Moberky who have done a number of packaging projects in this ‘sensitive area’, sanitary wear is “a sensitive product which demands a careful touch from designers. Much packaging for sensitive products has been dreary and apologetic. But there is a trend for an active, informational approach which avoids cliches, which is positive”.<sup>9</sup> When Always (plate 10) products were launched in the 1990s they were packaged in vivid purples and greens. Their new style of packaging has influenced other manufacturers. However, in some cases ‘jazzy’ packaging has been used to disguise products.

### Plate 10.

Always product packaging.



*Always* CLEANER  
*Always* DRIER



Sanitary wear products are often over packaged, towels are individually wrapped, and then wrapped again with plastic packaging. This results in wasted energy and resources and adds to the non-biodegradable waste in land fills. Increased consumer concern over conservation issues has caused women - the "greener" sex - to start reducing their own unnecessary personal consumption of disposable materials, and some manufactures are taking notice. Always Ultra towels are sold in 'easy wrap' one piece plastic pouches (plate 11) which contain the towel and act as its backing sheet or release paper. The used towel can also be placed back into the wrapper, and fastened using the resealable tape, for dustbin disposal.

### **Product Names**

As I have said it is through sanitary wear that 20th century menstruation taboos persist, and this is clear through the names of products. Kotex Miss Deb, was one of the first towels marketed. The name implies femininity and daintiness which have no direct association with menstruation. "It is not easy to play the idol, the far away princess, when one feels the bloody cloth between one's legs; and more generally, when one is conscious of the primitive misery of being a body."<sup>10</sup> Secrecy and embarrassment are symptoms of the modern menstrual taboo. The name Secrets identifies these attitudes to be the norm. Care Free and Stay Free imply that women can be neither without their product.



Advertisement for Always 'easy wrap' towels.

# EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT WEARING ALWAYS, IT WON'T SHOW.



Our pads are just as discreet to carry as they are to wear.



Each one comes in its own little wrapper. When you're out and about, it's harder for people to spot. But it's dead easy to dispose of. Just wrap, seal and throw away.



There's no disguising one thing though. The fact it's ultra thin and ultra reliable. Our unique Dri-weave topsheet lets moisture in, but hardly any out.

Outstanding.

And remember, all this will be your little secret.



ALWAYS. ALL YOU FEEL IS CLEAN AND DRY.



For more information Freephone 0800 187916.



## **CHAPTER V.**

### **BIG BUSINESS, small wonder**

Menstruation is big business. The industry is worth £360 million in the UK alone. This figure includes money spent on disposal and £50 million spent on products to relieve PMS. With a declining population the number of menstruating women in Britain has remained static, yet we are buying more sanitary wear today than ever before. In 1993 the sanitary wear sector was worth £223 million. Recent growth in the market has been attributed to an increase in the length of time in which sanitary wear products are needed. This is a result of earlier menstruation, later menopause and fewer women becoming pregnant.

#### **Product Development**

Expansion of the sanitary wear market has been accredited to the continued development of external products. Innovations in both use of materials and design has boosted overall sales, because it encourages women to move towards 'dual usage' of products. Product development includes, the introduction of thin, ultra absorbent towels, the addition of 'wings' so as to give protection to clothing and a larger range of specific external products. There has been a return to external sanitary wear, as sanitary towels have become more popular than tampons.<sup>1</sup> 'Dual usage' and 'combination usage' mean that women are using both tampons and sanitary towels during their period alternating during cycles and between night and day, and sometimes using tampons with panty liners for extra 'protection'. Women are also being encouraged to use panty liners between periods.



Tampon manufacturers are eager to regain the market share lost to external products in recent years. They have introduced more comfortable methods of insertion, such as the Tampax's Satin Touch applicator which is reputed to "offer all the comfort of a plastic applicator while being recycled paper". They launched Tampax Compak, a premium priced product and Tampets in early 1994. But these improvements are superficial and the product itself has developed very little. The lack of change in the design of tampons compared to external towels may be due to women's fears of TSS. So it is more likely for tampons to be repackaged than redesigned.

**Plate 12.**

Belt worn around the waist to hold looped towels.





### Social Class

The majority of marketers target products to consumers according to class.<sup>2</sup> This is evident through price which in turn affects the quality of a product. Tampons vary in price, according to the product range and absorbency. Boots chemist sell their own brand of tampons which are cheaper than the leading brands, but tampons cannot be purchased in bargain shops, e.g. Pounds Worth. Perhaps this is because women would be reluctant to use a tampon if the quality was questionable.

At the higher end of the sanitary towel market are the leading brands, examples are Kotex and Always. They have large advertising campaigns and individually packaged products. Supermarkets, such as Dunnes and Quinnsworth, also produce their own brands of towels, they are cheaper and not individually packaged. Sanitary towels can also be purchased from bargain stores. These towels are of poor quality, they are bulky and have one adhesive strip, similar to how other towels were before new developments in materials and design. Looped towels hook onto an elastic belt(plate 12) worn around the waist and were surpassed in design in the 1960s when new ways of attaching towels to underwear were developed. According to looped towel, manufacturers, Smith and Nephew "In performance terms, they are inferior to new towels. Their only benefit is that they cost less"(Appendix I, letter c). But looped towels are available throughout Ireland, "looped towels sell in communities that are generally not as comfortable talking about menstruation (so the benefits of better products are not discussed) or where money is very tight". Disposable products which are kinder to the environment such as Naturacare towels



and tampons, and other alternative sanitary wear, are understandably more expensive because they are produced on a smaller scale and are not available in supermarkets. As a result women with less money do not have the option of buying them.

According to Market Research GB,<sup>3</sup> the large increase in the market value during 1992 and 1993 will slow as the effects of the 'Ultra' and 'Wings' revolution fall away. External sanitary wear will continue to be the dominant form of sanitary wear although there are signs of a fight back, on grounds of comfort and security, through advertising by the manufacturers of tampons. There will be a continued trend in 'dual usage'. Product developments will continue to exhibit a greater emphasis on performance as manufacturers strive to produce the most comfortable and effective means of sanitary wear.

### Financial Cost

Sanitary wear is expensive. A box of tampons costs around £3.00 for thirty and towels are about £1.20 for ten. High prices are a result of market domination by a small number of companies. Most of the tampon revenue goes to Tambrands and Smith & Nephew which have 90% of the market. Tambrands has the largest market share with 59.1% in 1993 and they are selling in over 150 countries with plans to establish operations in Russia and the Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> In 1991 Tambrands reduced the number of tampons in a box from forty to thirty two. Tambrands told share holders "we made product and packaging improvements, reduced the size and price of our packages and increased our price per tampon".<sup>4</sup> What the consumer saw



was the same basic product with a new 'tamper evident seal' and a slightly altered applicator.

### Value Added Tax (VAT)

Zero rate VAT applies in this country to tampons and sanitary towels, in accordance with transitional arrangements permitted under European Union, VAT law. Accordingly, VAT is not included in the retail price of these items (Appendix I, letter d). EU, VAT law lists sanitary protection products among the goods and services in the respect of which member States have the option of applying a reduced rate of VAT (subject to a minimum level of five percent).

VAT is supposed to be tax levied on non-essential items. In Britain these products are obviously considered to be luxury items because a 17.5% VAT rate applies. The British government collects over thirty million pounds from VAT on sanitary protection products each year. According to a survey carried out by the supermarket chain ASDA, 91 per-cent of all women are opposed to the tax on sanitary wear, they consider them to be an essential monthly purchase. "The Campaign Against VAT on Sanitary Wear" has existed in Britain since 1981, but because of the 'sensitive nature' of sanitary wear products the campaign have found it difficult to gain media attention.



## CHAPTER VI

### Alternatives to Commercial Sanitary Wear

Supermarket and chemist shelves are stocked with a large range of sanitary wear products, all claiming to be different in style, comfort and image. But is there a real choice for women who are aware of the economical and environmental implications of buying this sanitary wear? All of these products are disposable and with the exception of supermarket brands they are within the same price range.

#### **Disposable Pads**

Naturacare (UK) Limited are a British company who produce “kinder to nature” tampons and press on towels, “for women who care about the environment”(plate 13). They are made of non-chlorine bleached fluff pulp with no optical whiteners or perfumes and the box is made of recycled card. Each purchase contributes to a fund for nature. Naturacare products are not widely available, but they can be purchased in health food shops throughout Ireland. Naturacare do not provide a particularly good alternative to conventional towels, because they have a similar product description to some leading brands. Established manufacturers are also concerned (because of consumer trends) about the environment. Procter & Gamble's, Always towels are also oxygen bleached, they use 50% less pulp (by weight) than other pads and although, packaging materials are plastic they are compatible with safe land fill. There is no justifiable reason for sanitary pads to be bleached, they are not clinically sterile. White “symbolises purity and hygiene, and signifies conspicuous consumption and



environmental irresponsibility.”<sup>1</sup> As people become familiar with off whites through the use of other recycled products, such as paper, this may cease to be the case. Arguably, unbleached sanitary pads would benefit the environment and reduce manufacturing costs. By bleaching their towels Naturacare are causing unnecessary harm to the environment and increasing production costs.

**Plate 13.**

Naturacare sanitary towels.



1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year, and the second section deals with the specific results of the work.

2. The second part of the report deals with the specific results of the work. It is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with the results of the work in the field of agriculture, the second section deals with the results of the work in the field of industry, and the third section deals with the results of the work in the field of commerce.

3. The third part of the report deals with the conclusions and recommendations. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the conclusions and the second section deals with the recommendations.

### Reusable Pads

Reusable towels are environmentally safe and more economical. No reusable pads are sold in supermarkets and they do not feature in figures for the sales of menstrual wear in Britain. So, one could presume that these products were either not in demand or unavailable. There are seven manufacturers in the U.S.A. and Canada and one manufacturer in Britain.

Glad Rags produce cloth pads. It is a female-owned company. They believe that “people have the power to effect change through choices, actions and purchases”.<sup>2</sup> Making “quality, long lasting cloth pads” is their way of doing just that. Each pad consists of one envelope and two insertable liners. The envelope snaps around your panties with the smooth side against your body. You can use one liner for light days or two for heavy flow days. The cotton chamois flannel is soft and conforms naturally to the shape of your body. The cotton also allows for circulation of air. Glad Rags are available in a range of colours. They offer unbleached, undyed cotton and an organic pad from cotton grown without pesticides.

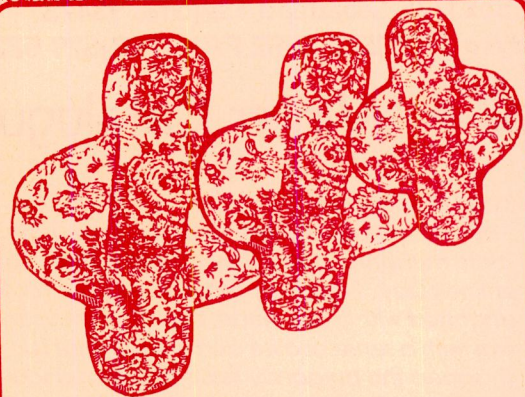
Glad Rags aim to dissociate sanitary wear from the taboo of menstruation. The name Glad Rags encourages women to be proud by reclaiming the word ‘rag’ which has often been used as a derogatory term, for example ‘jam rag’. Information about Glad Rags is available through the internet and orders can be placed using this service, which is a modern medium with a world wide readership.





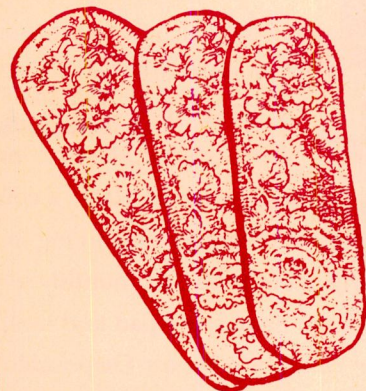
## Moon Wraps

are easy to use, oval shaped pads made from layers of flannel and terry cloth. They have the additional benefit of "wings" that snap around your panties to stay in place. They can be combined with **Petal Pads** or **Fold to Fits** for more absorbency. They come in Mini, Midi and Maxi sizes.



## Petal Pads

are oval shaped pads in varying thicknesses and widths of terry cloth and flannel. They come in three sizes of Mini, Midi and Maxi and can be combined with **Moon Wraps** and **Fold to Fits** or worn in **Moon Panties**.





Glanmill produce incontinence products and Ecofem washable sanitary towels, “personal protection for those who care for about the future”. Ecofem products are only available by mail order catalogue. They associate their two markets by including them in the same catalogue. Incontinence is an affliction, menstruation is not. Although Ecofem pads are better for the environment, by grouping sanitary wear with aids for the aged and incontinent, they do not help to disassociate sanitary wear from the taboos surrounding menstruation.

Most women are hesitant to try reusable pads and are disgusted or uneasy at the idea. As with home made reusable towels women have to overcome the ‘inconvenience’ of washing and reusing them. Ideally, pads should be rinsed out and soaked until they can all be washed at the same time to conserve water, detergent and energy. Pads should be rinsed immediately after use to prevent staining, but this can sometimes be impractical, “rinsing one out in a public rest room or at work required a whole new level of intimacy with colleagues.”<sup>3</sup> For women who are embarrassed by the whole area of menstruation, washing them would make the burdensome task of concealment even harder. Even women who feel comfortable talking about menstruation may find it difficult when sharing accommodation. The Food and Drugs Administration (USA) did forbid the sale of cloth pads in 1976, stating that they were potentially harmful, this ruling has since been withdrawn and their sale is legal.<sup>4</sup>



## **Making Your Own**

The inventor of the tampon and founder of Tambrands Ltd., Dr. Earle Cleveland Haas, Mr. Kimberly, Mr. Clark, Mr. Procter, Mr. Gamble, and Mr. Smith and his nephew, are the leading manufacturers of sanitary wear and they are all men. Sanitary wear is expensive. Profits go to the company owners, the majority of whom are men. Because some women do not want to support this patriarchal, capitalist structure they choose to make their own sanitary towels. There are also women in Western societies as well as in less affluent countries who cannot afford commercial sanitary towels and who therefore have to make their own washable ones.

Women with light menstrual flow can improvise by putting a folded handkerchief into their under wear or by fastening a folded handkerchief into a belt designed to hold sanitary towels, (Appendix IV). As I have said, women have been making reusable pads for hundreds of years, using rags or cotton. A pattern for making your own is contained in Hygieia: A Women's Herbal. The author, Jeanine Parvati believes that the most important aspect of the process of menstruation is the sense of self worth that you bring to this ritual, "There is an art to bleeding - as in everything else. The sanitary pad becomes the canvas onto which you pour the paint of your being."<sup>5</sup> The pattern (plate 15) consists of a simple rectangle sewn in to an envelope into which you stuff cotton batting or sponge, and the herbs of your choosing. You can use your preferred material, e.g. velvet, satin or rags and herbs.



# pattern for making your own

The most important aspect of this process ~ "making your own" ~ is the sense of self-worth and appreciation you bring to this ritual. Creating a receptacle for your blood is a positive affirmation of your femaleness and is to be celebrated.

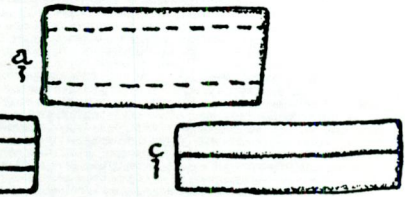
## suggested materials

soft cloth, rags, velvet, calico, muslin, satin  
1" wide elastic  
velcro ~ self-adhesive tape  
cotton batting or sponge  
herbs: pennyroyal, cinnamon, peppermint, raspberry, chamomile, & so on.

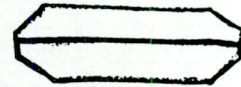


## the pad

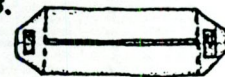
- ① Take a piece of cloth approx. 10" x 15", fold long edges in 2" & then into the middle like this ~



- ② Turn edges under to form tabs, like this ~



- ③ Sew edges down. Attach velcro to inside edges.

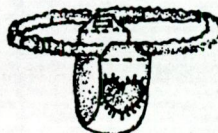


You now have a cloth envelope in which to stuff cotton batting or sponge, and herbs of your choosing.

## the belt

- ① Measure hips and double this length. Take a piece of cloth 4" wide & your length, fold in half, sew along edge & turn inside out.
- ② Insert elastic and herbs.
- ③ Attach ends together, forming a circle.
- ④ Attach other half of self-adhesive tape to outside of belt and match up.

It works best to have at least two pads, so one can be drying while you wear the other.



for cleaning,  
remove cotton batting,  
rinse cloth & dry. Or  
remove sponge, rinse  
in hot water & place  
in clean pad. ~

happy bleeding!



Making your own pads promotes self worth and confidence because you are dealing with your body and its functions by yourself. You are acknowledging a fundamental part of female experience. By using disposable products you are relying on others. Parvati wrote Hygieia in order to support cultural myths celebrating female sexuality in particular menstruation. Making and using your own is a good way of getting in touch with your body during menstruation. "Handling your sponge and blood help to discharge lots of self disgust, so inoculated by media, myths and poor health".<sup>5</sup>

### Natural/Sea Sponges

Sea sponges have always been used as natural tampons. They can be purchased from chemists, where they are sold for cosmetic use. They are also available by mail order, under the name Lunar Sponges, so called due to the relationship between women's menstrual cycles and lunar cycles. Sponges are small pored, highly absorbent and durable. They are the most ecological option as they are a renewable resource and reusable, lasting from six months up to a year. The sponge must be boiled once before initial use to sterilise it, from then on it can then be rinsed in water and reinserted, so no polluting detergents are used.

In the United States of America, sea sponges are not allowed to be sold as menstrual products, although they can be purchased for cosmetic use. The Food and Drug Administration banned menstrual sponges in 1981 after a University of Iowa study reported that sand, chemical pollutants, bacteria, and fungi were found in natural sponges. "Since sponges are natural,

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60607

1980

1981

1982

1983

1984

1985

1986

1987

1988

1989

1990

1991

1992

1993

1994

1995

1996

1997

1998

1999

2000

2001

2002

2003

2004

organic products, the levels of those substances can not be controlled or regulated,”<sup>6</sup> they explain. Like tampons, no further studies have been done to see whether the presence of those pollutants corresponded to other health problems. Unlike tampons, sponges have been removed from the market.

### Organic Cotton Tampons

Organic cotton is grown without the use of herbicides, fungicides or pesticides and has no harmful bleaches used in it's production. So, organic cotton tampons are totally free of toxic pesticides and herbicides. Naturacare produce an environmentally friendly tampon advertised as “chlorine free and non-irradiated, containing no synthetics, surfactanto, optical whiteners, fragrances or rayon fibres”. According to Naturacare president Susie Hewson, the company uses a high grade of long-fibre cotton, since the cheaper, short-fibre cotton can disintegrate more easily, leaving particles in the vagina.

### The Keeper

The Keeper (plate 16) is a small, internally worn, soft, rubber collecting cup for menstrual periods. It is about the same size as an egg cup and is inserted in a similar fashion to a diaphragm. It may not sound particularly revolutionary but in terms of sanitary wear it could be the beginning of a new era. It has been described as “the product that will change women's lives in the twentieth century”.<sup>6</sup> The Keeper is very economical, it costs £25 and can last for ten years. It is emptied depending on individual patterns and cycles. It can be rinsed in the sink and reinserted, if there is



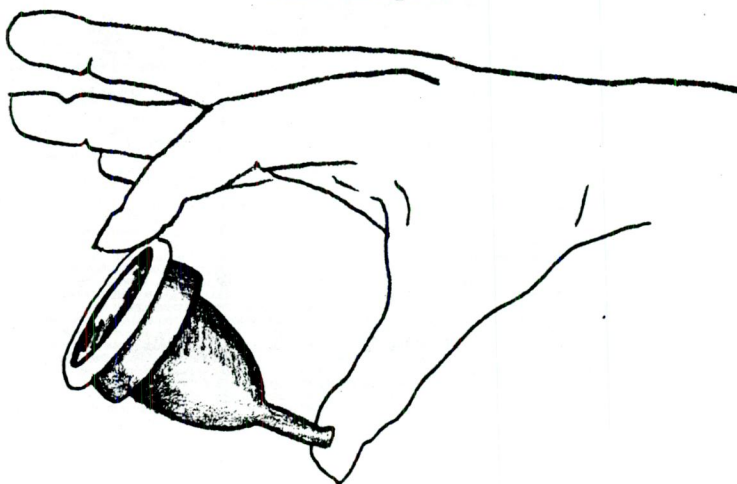
no sink in the toilet cubicle The Keeper can be emptied and wiped using toilet paper. The more open minded have the option of urinating into The Keeper in order to rinse it.

The Keeper has many advantages, for example if you were travelling, in a country in which you are not sure you will be able to buy tampons, your luggage will not have to contain boxes and boxes of sanitary wear. It is a new product and as of yet has not been fully marketed. With all new products there is always suspicion. But this is not a new concept. In 1962 Good Housekeeping advertised The Tasset, an identical device, so the products continued obscurity is odd. The Keeper might sound like a weird and horrible idea, but so did tampons and periods when you were first told about them.

Alternatives to commercial sanitary wear are plentiful and varied, but they are not widely available or fully marketed. Even if they were, it would take time for some women to become comfortable with these unconventional means.

**Plate 15.**

**The Keeper.**





## CONCLUSION

Women have inhabited the planet for approximately the past 40,000 years, and presumably menstruation has existed for just as long. Commercial sanitary wear has been available for the past 90 years and it is used by almost 100% of menstruating women and is considered to be essential. During this time we have seen very little product development, that is up until this decade. But the developments that we have experienced in the design and materials used in sanitary towels have not been mirrored in the design of tampons, and we are in fact experiencing a return to external sanitary wear. Design in this area must address the real needs of women. Instead, industrial design has been employed as a marketing tool, solving problems which do not exist. The new curved Kotex towel is designed to fit between a woman's legs, but towels are soft and naturally conform to the body. In the 1980s Tampax changed their applicator slightly, so that the tampon was totally sealed until it was inside the body, the design proved to be most uncomfortable in use and was soon withdrawn. Graphic designers have worked exhaustively to ensure that packaging and advertising are discreet.

Sanitary wear advertising encourages the shame and the need for secrecy which women feel about menstruation. Most women do not enjoy having their period and would rather not menstruate at all. The future may bring changes (the contraceptive pill is already being used to reduce menstrual flow) and women may soon have the choice of whether to menstruate or



not. Sanitary wear manufacturers would then have to encourage us to continue menstruating. Advertising would have to be used to emphasise the positive aspects of menstruation and design would be employed to influence us, by making pads more colourful and comfortable than ever, health risks and the real problems of use and disposal would have to be addressed. The burden of menstruation would no longer be on women, but on the shoulders of sanitary wear manufacturers.



## END NOTES

### Introduction

1. If the word 'herstory' ever had a legitimate role, it is in this context. However, 'herstory' is mainly used by lesbian feminist academics when writing about the history of sexuality. I chose not to use this word because this history of menstruation does not focus on sexuality.
2. Laws, p.45
3. McLear, p.1
4. The physical process of menstruation. At its most basic there is the school biology book description. This area also contains medical research into subjects such as Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). I will take for granted that people understand the facts of the menstrual cycle, but I intend to discuss TSS as it relates directly to the use of sanitary wear.
5. There has also been extensive research and writing on the world wide system of menstrual taboo, by which menstruating women were excluded from society so that they should not infect men, pollute food, or as Aristotle believed, tarnish mirrors with their breath. Women were dismissed to menstrual huts or women's quarters during menstruation. There is evidence of this taboo in ancient Greek and Roman times and also in the Old Testament of the Bible. I will be looking at menstrual taboos as they exist in modern society because this is what effects the way in which women buy, use, store and dispose of sanitary wear.



6. Advertising critics and feminist writers have been writing about the advertising of sanitary wear since the early eighties. Advertisements for sanitary products have been much studied, to “read” the messages they give about gender, for example Hazel Salvin 1981 and Ann Treneman 1988.
7. The relationship between menstrual cycles and lunar cycles is explored fully in The Wise Wound.

---

## Chapter I

1. Owen, p.143
2. Miles, p.10
3. Laws, p. 65, (quotes Sophie Laws of Sereny, 1977)
4. Miles, p.11
5. Small Objects of Desire; The Tampon.
6. Shorter, p. 260
7. Shorter author of A History of Women's Bodies

---

## Chapter II

1. Sanitary Protection (leaflet) published by the Women's Environmental Network
2. Unpublished historical information from Kimberly - Clark
3. Small Objects of Desire; The Tampon
4. Bailey, p. 6
5. Bailey, p.28



### Chapter III

---

1. Which?, Towels and Tampons, May/July 1994
2. de Beauvoir, p. 338
3. Laws, p. 55
4. Section 27(a) of the Public Health Act.
5. Sanitary Protection(leaflet) published by the Women's Environmental Network.
6. de Beauvoir, p.337

### Chapter IV

---

1. Weideger, p. 143
2. Kupfermann, p. 61
3. The separation of husband and wife for five days during and seven days following menstruation.
4. Kupfermann, p. 62
5. Douglas, p.121
6. Treneman, p. 160
7. British Advertising Guidelines
  - a. No advertisement can contain anything likely to cause embarrassment or to undermine an individual's confidence in her own personal hygiene standards.
  - b. All visual treatments must be tasteful and restrained. Great care must be taken with any detailed description of the product, whether in sound or vision, to avoid anything that might offend or embarrass viewers.



c. Great care must be taken with any detailed description of the product, whether in sound or vision, to avoid anything which may offend or embarrass viewers.

d. Normal marketing techniques such as pack offers and samples are acceptable.

e. Personal endorsements and testimonials are acceptable.

f. No implication of, or appeal to, sexual or social security is acceptable.

g. The use of potentially offensive words such as 'odour' is not acceptable.

h. Female presenters and voice-overs are generally more appropriate than male in commercials for sanitary protection products. The acceptability of male presenters and voice-overs will be decided on the merits of each individual case.

i. Particular discretion is required where an advertiser wishes to communicate a product's suitability for very young women, and girls shown in such commercials should not be less than 14 or 15 years old.

j. Overt references to relationships with members of the opposite sex should be avoided and men should not be featured prominently in commercials for sanitary protection products. There is no objection to male characters in peripheral roles in playlet-type commercials.

8. Miles, p. 82

9. Bennet, p. 27

10. de Beauvoir, p. 380



## Chapter V

1. Market Research GB. 1995, Source: Trade estimates.
2. According to Market Research GB. 1995 sanitary towels are purchased most by ABs (those in the highest socioeconomic group) and 35-44 year olds. With tampons, ABs and women aged between 18 and 24 also claim the highest levels of user ship for both applicator and non-applicator type. Young teenagers and women who have recently given birth or who are close to the menopause prefer towels.
3. Market Research GB, 1993
5. Houppert, p. 31

## Chapter VI

1. Whiteley, p. 80
2. World Wide Web, Glad Rags
3. World Wide Web, 'The adventures of gynomight girl.'
4. Owen, p. 179
5. Parvati, p. 13
6. Warwick Boar, p. 8



## **Appendix 1**

### **LETTERS**

- a. Letter from Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland.  
Noel McMahon, Chief Executive, 09.11.95
- b. Letter from Hello!  
Sarah Pearson, Advertisement Director, 02.10.95
- c. Letter from Smith and Nephew, 27.10.95  
Shelly Law, Senior Brand Manager.
- d. Letter from Department of Finance.  
Hannah O’Riordan, 31.10.95



9th November 1995

ADVERTISING STANDARDS  
AUTHORITY FOR IRELAND

Ms Asumpta Sweeney,  
Industrial Design Department,  
National College of Art and Design,  
100 Thomas Street,  
Dublin 8.



Dear Ms Sweeney,

IPC HOUSE,  
35/39 SHELBOURNE RD.,  
DUBLIN 4.  
TELEPHONE (01) 6608766  
FAX (01) 6608113

We have received your letter requesting information in connection with your thesis on the design and marketing of women's sanitary protection.

As you may know, the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland was established by the advertising industry with the aim of promoting the highest standards in advertising. We enforce the Code of Advertising Standards for Ireland and also the Code of Sales Promotion Practice. Copies of the Codes and our most recent Annual Report are enclosed.

The Code of Advertising Standards provides that all advertisements should be "legal, decent, honest and truthful" and should be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and society. The Code does not contain a separate set of rules for advertisements related to sanitary protection products but such advertisements are required to comply with the general rules of the Code including those concerning matters of 'taste and decency' (Sections 2.13 - 2.15)

In the past three years ASAI received 8 complaints about san-pro advertisements, all of which related to television and/or radio commercials. The reasons given for the complaints were that the products were considered unsuitable for TV/radio coverage and that the advertisements were offensive and embarrassing. Some complainants considered that the advertisements were broadcast at inappropriate times.

Radio Telefis Eireann are members of ASAI and all commercials carried by RTE must comply with the ASAI Code and with RTE's own rules. The station has a Copy Clearance Committee consisting of both men and women who vet all television and radio advertisements to check that they meet the criteria of both the ASAI Code and the RTE rules. This Committee also review commercials which are the subject of complaint. RTE have assured us that in the case of sanitary protection products, special care is taken to ensure that they are tastefully presented and that they are normally subject to restricted time bands.

We hope that the foregoing information and the enclosures are of assistance to you in your work and we wish you every success with your thesis.

Yours sincerely,

Noel McMahon,  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

Encls.

Chairman:  
Dr. Joseph C. McGough, K.M., S.C.  
Chief Executive and Secretary:  
Noel McMahon  
Registered in Dublin No. 82219.





● HELLO! LIMITED, Wellington House, 69-71 Upper Ground, London SE1 9PQ Telephone: 0171-334 7404 ●  
Fax: 0171-334 7411

Ms Asumpta Sweeney  
Industrial Design Dept  
National College of Art and Design  
100 Thomas Street  
DUBLIN  
Ireland

2nd October 1995

Dear Ms Sweeney,

Thank you for your letter, dated 30th September.

I enclose, for your information, a copy of our media pack, in which you will find details of our readership; as you will see, 74% of our readers are women.

In answer to your second question, we took a decision some years ago not to carry "sanpro" advertising. This was because we wanted the advertising content of *Hello!* to reflect the editorial style, in that the magazine is all about the good things in life. Equally, we did not wish to alienate or discourage male readers. However, this policy is not set in stone and there is no reason why it should not be changed in the future should we see fit to do so.

I hope this information helps you with your thesis, and may I take this opportunity to wish you good luck with your final year.

Yours sincerely

SARAH PEARSON  
Advertisement Director



**Smith & Nephew Consumer Products Limited**

Alum Rock Road, Birmingham B8 3DZ  
Telephone: 0121-327 4750.  
Telefax: 0121-327 6172  
Telex: 338340 SANCON G.

**Smith+Nephew**

Our Ref: SLL/MJS

Date: 27 October 1995

Ms A Sweeney  
Industrial Design Department  
National College of Art and Design  
100 Thomas Street  
Dublin 8  
Ireland

Dear Ms Sweeney

Thank you for your letter regarding your design project. Unfortunately, we are unable to supply you with much of the material you require, however a main library will be able to help you on some of the historic data.

With regard to research and development, I am afraid that I can only release general information, as this is confidential. We do follow a classical R & D approach, which is led by the "needs of women". These needs are identified via the use of 2 types of market research: continuous monitoring of UK, pointer and parallel markets and ad hoc research. The latter is initially "idea" driven - a Usage and Attitudes Study or some qualitative study groups will be used to identify the way women live and what their needs and wants are. Following on from this, products will be constructed to meet those needs by the technical department. These are then tested on an internal panel of volunteers and, when proven, quantified by placement amongst everyday women in the target market. The products are scored by predetermined expected benefits. Subsequently, product design is amended to most closely match needs.

We have a focused approach to advertising, where only "big brands" or brands with sales potential are supported. To this end, only LIL-LETS is supported above and below-the-line and Dr Whites Secrets below-the-line, the whole of Smith & Nephew towel range (except looped towels and Poise) have been relaunched this month under the Secrets umbrella brand to increase shelf impact.

The key to our advertising strategy on LIL-LETS revolves around discretion and relevance. This does not mean putting menstruation back in a brown paper bag, but it does mean being sensitive to women's communication needs. Not everyone is confident enough to watch loud tampon advertising in the same room as their partner. In 1995 we have spent £2.6 million above-the-line on this strategy.



"Looped towels" are not a growth part of the sanitary protection market. In performance terms, they are inferior to tampons and the new Ultra towels. Their only benefit is that they cost less.

The belts are still offered as a sale item to the trade, with a limited number of chemists still stocking.



Looped towels sell in communities that are generally not as comfortable talking about menstruation (so the benefits of better products are not discussed) or where money is very tight.

I take issue with your statement "the disposal of sanitary products creates serious environmental hazards". LIL-LETS tampons are biodegradable. They are fully flushable. Therefore, the best method of disposal for these is flushing (our leaflets instruct to flush or bin as desired). Flushing is only an issue if water companies have inefficient screens. These screens catch hard matter which is then landfilled - and then decomposes. Binning can be a health hazard if bins are not disinfected, sealed and emptied on a daily basis. If the bin is lined with plastic, this adds to the waste.

Towels do need to be binned as the "backing strip" is normally of a plastic base. We advise binning of these products and disposal with the household waste. Bin-men are not, however, obliged to take items such as nappies in the waste, although most local authorities do.

The alternative is to burn waste. We have and continue to carry out studies monitoring emissions from this option. In analysis, the resources that are used, for example energy heat to burn sanitary protection, uses up more of the earth's resources than natural decomposition. For this reason, we continue to recommend flushing and binning.

I hope that this answers most of your questions.

Good luck with your project. We would be interested to see the results.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Shelley Law".

**Shelley Law**  
**Senior Brand Manager**





Office of the  
**MINISTER FOR FINANCE**

Our Ref: 95/0175/MF

31 October 1995

Ms Asumpta Sweeney  
Industrial Design Department  
National College of Art and Design  
100 Thomas St  
Dublin 8

Dear Ms Sweeney

The Minister for Finance, Mr Ruairí Quinn T.D. has asked me to refer to your recent letter regarding the VAT treatment of women's sanitary protection products.

In accordance with transitional arrangements permitted under EU VAT law, the zero rate of VAT applies in this country to tampons and sanitary towels. Accordingly, VAT is not included in the retail price of these items.

You may also be interested in knowing that EU VAT law lists sanitary protection products amongst the goods and services in respect of which member States have the option of applying a reduced rate of VAT (subject to a minimum level of 5%). However, I have no information as to what countries have availed of this option to-date.

Yours sincerely

  
Hannah O'Riordan  
Private Secretary

1940  
1941

1942  
1943

1944  
1945



Office of the  
**MINISTER FOR FINANCE**

Our Ref: 95/0175/MF

31 October 1995

Ms Asumpta Sweeney  
Industrial Design Department  
National College of Art and Design  
100 Thomas St  
Dublin 8

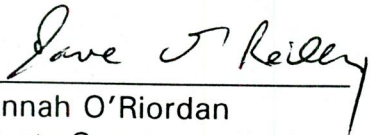
Dear Ms Sweeney

The Minister for Finance, Mr Ruairí Quinn T.D. has asked me to refer to your recent letter regarding the VAT treatment of women's sanitary protection products.

In accordance with transitional arrangements permitted under EU VAT law, the zero rate of VAT applies in this country to tampons and sanitary towels. Accordingly, VAT is not included in the retail price of these items.

You may also be interested in knowing that EU VAT law lists sanitary protection products amongst the goods and services in respect of which member States have the option of applying a reduced rate of VAT (subject to a minimum level of 5%). However, I have no information as to what countries have availed of this option to-date.

Yours sincerely

  
Hannah O'Riordan  
Private Secretary



**Appendix 2**  
**TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS:**  
**Summary of Contents**



**a. Telephone interview, 29.09.95**

**Aiden Devlin, Advertising Manager**

**Image Magazine**

Image Magazine has never received a complaint regarding sanpro advertising because it is a purely women's medium. These adverts deal with menstruation in an up front way. The client ('sanpro' manufacturer) decides where the ads are to be placed in the magazine. If an advertisement was not suitable we would tell the client and ask them to change it.

**b. Telephone interview, 29.09.95**

**Bob Mc Mahon, advertising editor,**

**Woman's Way.**

Woman's Way has a volume/content of 60% articles to 40% advertisements. We do not discriminate between brands. Sanpro advertisements should be discreet and it is not the place for them than on television. Some 'sanpro' advertisements are designed to suit the Irish market.

**c. Telephone interview, Joan Long, *Concern***

**18.11.95**

In most third world countries, Western products are available in shops, but the people *Concern* deal with do not buy them. Women make their own sanitary pads which they wash and reuse. In some cultures the women do not wear knickers, e.g. Bangladeshi women who wear saris. So, they have to make belts to fix them to. Better off women or older women may wear pants.



## **Appendix 3**

### **LEAFLETS**

- a. Code of Practice of the Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturers.
- b. Sanitary Protection: Women's Health And the Environment.  
published by The Women's Environmental Network



The Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturers (ASPM) represents companies in the United Kingdom which manufacture and market feminine hygiene products, namely towels, tampons and panty liners.

## Code of practice

**Member companies of the ASPM are determined that their industry should be responsible, competitive, environmentally conscious, innovative and dynamic and are constantly working to achieve this.**

The Association's members have a long history of supplying safe, high performance products to consumers and all members conform to the established practices of the industry. The industry is fully alive and responsive to environmental issues which are of global concern and plays a full part in its relations with raw material suppliers, the consumers of its products and appropriate government departments.

The Association's Code of Practice provides guidelines on such matters as good manufacturing practice, product safety, product packaging and product disposability. The guidelines also set out procedures for absorbency classification, advertising and product promotion.

### Objectives of the Association

1. The purpose of the ASPM is to act as an unbiased authority on all matters relating to the manufacture, marketing and selling of feminine hygiene products within the UK and to liaise with those who are in any way interested or affected.
2. The ASPM, through its formulation and adoption of an agreed Code of Practice, complies with the guidelines laid down by the Fair Trading Act to provide industry guidance for "Safeguarding and promoting the interests of consumers in the UK".

3. In addition to establishing a basic point of reference for feminine hygiene supplies, the ASPM is also committed to the improvement of communication between manufacturers and consumers.

4. The Association maintains a close dialogue with appropriate Government Departments on all issues relevant to the feminine hygiene products industry.

### Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Health

The Association maintains voluntary contact with government bodies and undertakes key regulatory tasks of a non-commercial nature, so they are fully aware of the particular needs of manufacturers and consumers.

- the establishment with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Health of a voluntary notification scheme for new tampon products and changes to existing brands.
- the issuing of the Code of Practice which provides guidelines on manufacturing, marketing and selling feminine hygiene products which are acceptable to the Office of Fair Trading and which has received the ratification of both the DTI and DH.

### Educational Assistance

Association members are particularly conscious of the continuing need for education materials for children and women, relating to the biological, personal hygiene and social issues associated with the usage of feminine hygiene products.

Many manufacturers produce a range of useful educational material - illustrated booklets, wall charts, teaching notes and audio visual presentations, which are available free of charge.

Some members of the Association offer a free schools advisory service whereby, at the request of the school, qualified nurses visit classes of either just girls or mixed sex groups to talk about the issues surrounding puberty, including menstruation. These talks are very popular and prove that even in these days of enlightenment, the issues of talking about menstruation is one that teachers and indeed parents still find difficult to cope with.

### COMPETITIVE

#### Characteristics of the Industry

The industry actively seeks to improve the quality and consumer value of its products.

The competition among firms within the industry is characterised by aggressive pricing, new product development, resourceful advertising and marketing programmes.

The diversity of product sub-types and brands gives consumers a wide range of choice for individual needs.

The Association presently consists of the following members.

Chilwood Limited  
 Hygieia Healthcare Limited  
 Johnson & Johnson Limited  
 Kimberly-Clark Limited  
 Procter & Gamble Limited  
~~Robinson Healthcare Limited~~  
 Sancella Limited  
 Smith and Nephew Consumer Products Limited  
~~Tambrands Limited~~

# get

# the

## TAMPON DEVELOPMENTS

### Tampon Labelling

A recent voluntary initiative by the ASPM, announced packaging changes for all packs of tampons produced by its member companies.

The new packaging will include on pack, a strengthened notice on Toxic Shock Syndrome, a rare disease which can be linked with tampon use. The packs will be in production at the beginning of 1993 and on sale in shops by the end of February/March 1993 onwards.

caring for the environment

Pack details will include a notice saying "Tampons are associated with Toxic shock Syndrome (TSS). TSS is a rare, but serious disease that may cause death. Read and save the enclosed information." The packaging will also detail that there is a range of absorbencies available and give absorbency guidelines as well as advice to use the lowest absorbency possible. The insert leaflet provides clear and detailed information on TSS, advising anyone who believes they have TSS symptoms to seek medical advice immediately.

Toxic Shock Syndrome is a rare disease - there is an average of twenty confirmed cases a year in the UK out of a total population of 55 million. Only approximately half these cases (ie 10 confirmed cases) are menstrual related - out of a menstruating population of 14 million. There may be an additional 20 cases a year but insufficient data are available to confirm the diagnosis. There has been no evidence that the number of cases has increased over the last five years. Over the past six years there has been an average of one to two deaths a year from TSS which are menstrual related.

With the improved understanding of TSS amongst its consumers, the ASPM is now confident that the on pack warning will be seen in the correct perspective and not cause needless alarm. The on pack notice is the latest development in a continual programme by the ASPM to help increase awareness of TSS and reduce the very small risk associated with it.



### GPs get the facts on TSS

More than 2,000 fact packs detailing the symptoms and treatment of toxic shock syndrome (TSS) have been mailed to GPs, following a letter inviting 34,000 UK practitioners to send off for detailed information on the disease.

TSS can develop very quickly and requires urgent admission to hospital. Female patients showing any of the symptoms should always be asked whether they are wearing a tampon.

The ASPM factpack contains a detailed question-and-answer guide to toxic shock syndrome, together with samples of tampon packs and enclosed instruction leaflets containing information on TSS for consumers. Literature issued by member companies aimed at schoolgirls on the use of tampons and related matter is also included.

Questions dealt with in detail list the symptoms of TSS, its causes, occurrence and treatment. Others discuss the links between TSS and tampons, and provide guidelines on their safe and hygienic use.

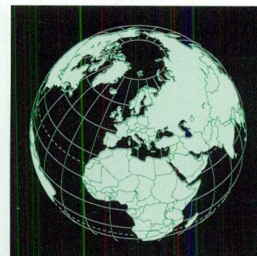
## Insert Leaflet

The industry has included TSS information within the insert leaflet since 1981 and an on-pack notice was introduced in 1990.

Recent research conducted by the industry has shown that whilst awareness of TSS has increased, consumers now have a much better understanding of its rarity and the need to follow the usage advice given. Member companies are now including more detailed information on TSS within their insert leaflets - advising consumers to follow the advice given:-

- Tampons should be changed on average every 4-6 hours.
- Remember to wear the correct tampon absorbency for your needs.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after inserting a tampon.
- Check that you have removed your last tampon when your period is over.
- Only use tampons when you have your period.

ASPM believe that the information will give women full assurance to continue to use tampons safely and to be able to enjoy the freedom and security that these products offer.



# facts

## ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS

### Disposability

One of the aims of the ASPM is the understanding and improving of the environmental impacts of their products, without sacrificing the performance, comfort and security the consumer demands. Equally, the members of the ASPM are committed to finding ways of further reducing the impact of feminine hygiene products on the environment. Manufacturers are continually updating these products, particularly in recent years.

### Flushing and Sewage Works

The predominant disposal method for sanitary towels and pantyliners in the UK is flushing. On-pack disposal instructions have, therefore, reflected this.

Unfortunately, a number of used products (very few in relation to total quantities used) continue to escape from sewage systems and reappear as debris/litter on river banks, shorelines and beaches.

Manufacturers are continually evaluating alternatives, for example, biodegradable plastics as the best way of eliminating the problem. However, such materials must fulfil strict performance criteria, ie. they must be waterproof in use and degrade completely and

effectively after use without breaking up into small particles or causing other adverse environmental effects. Such plastics, satisfactory in all respects, are not yet available and so litter problems, arising usually from inadequate sewage systems, continue to occur in some locations.

The ASPM has worked closely with Tidy Britain Group, various research institutions, water authorities and sewage companies to establish the scale of the problem and methods of overcoming it. The latter are known, but the expense and timescale for their installation mean that the problem of feminine hygiene related litter will inevitably persist in certain locations.

The ASPM, jointly with Wessex Water, commissioned the Water Research Centre to evaluate the effect of 6mm screens being stipulated by the National Rivers Authority, for removing feminine hygiene products.

The results conclusively showed that products and their components were removed and the screen only failed when strips of 30mm and less were introduced.

ASPM also commissioned Wessex Water Environmental Services to evaluate the efficiency of a sewage treatment works in removing feminine hygiene products, which indicated an efficiency greater than 96%.

Since privatisation, water companies have made major investments in sewage treatment and this work is continuing.

### Marine Litter

A recent study conducted by the Tidy Britain Group shows that the majority of marine litter found on our beaches is caused by plastic bags, four packs, fishing gear and ropes, sweet wrappers and glass.

### Domestic Waste Disposal

A recent move by all members producing sanitary towels and pantliners has been to educate consumers towards disposal in the domestic waste system, as a possible alternative to flushing. Some members are now advising consumers not to flush sanitary towels and pantyliners and to dispose of used products into the domestic waste bin. Other members however, suggest this method of disposal as an alternative to flushing. This move is a further step in educating the consumers and forms part of an ongoing programme.

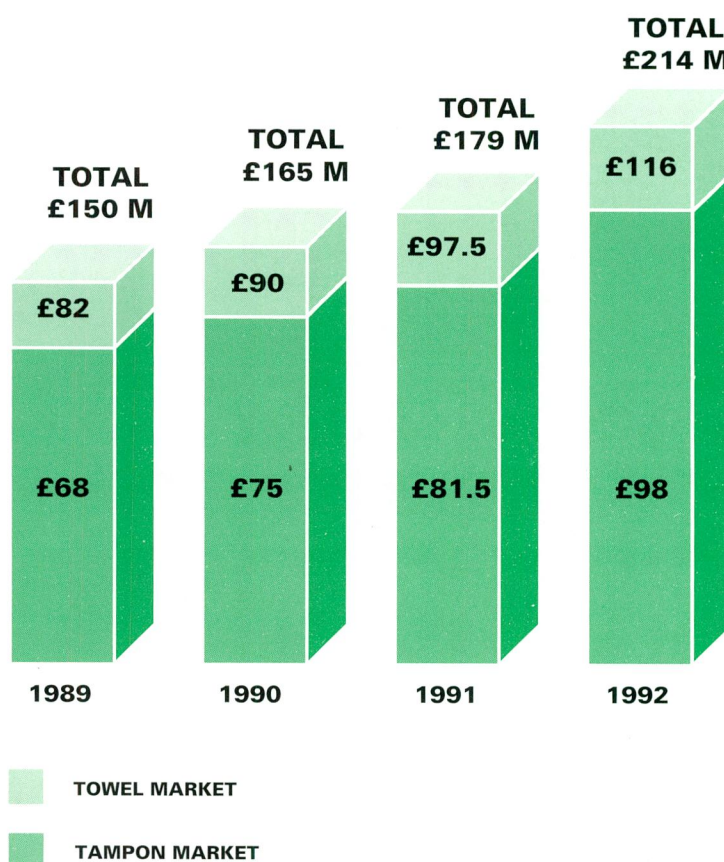
To dispose of the product via the domestic waste, the product should be securely wrapped within a paper or plastic bag and will either go to landfill or be incinerated.

## INNOVATIVE

Innovation is a key within the industry, to meet both the perceived consumer needs as they evolve and dynamic changes in consumer purchasing patterns.

Since the introduction of disposable feminine hygiene products in the late 19th Century, there has been a significant change in the feminine hygiene available today. Manufacturers aim to provide the consumer with the most comfortable, hygienic and secure products.

**Market Growth** The table below gives the trends in the market from 1989 - 1992:-



## DYNAMIC

### Advertising

The advertising of feminine hygiene has changed markedly over the years, lifting some of the taboos which formally prevailed.

Both ITV channels are available to the industry for its members to advertise their brands. Great care is taken by those manufacturers using the medium to ensure that they achieve, in conjunction with the ITCA, the right balance between information and potential offence to the viewing public.

# Sanitary Protection: Women's Health and the Environment

The  
Women's  
Environmental  
Network

We as women, menstruate on average 4 to 5 days each month for about 35 years, spending a possible total of 6.5 years bleeding. Most women in the world have no access to the luxury of disposable sanitary towels and tampons, while the average 'western' woman uses about ten thousand such items during her life.

Western society's concealment of menstruation has given rise to expensive, wasteful, polluting sanitary products which bring unnecessary health and period problems for women.

There are 13.4 million menstruating women in the UK. In 1990, we spent £160 million on 3,000,000,000 disposable, one-use-only sanitary towels and tampons. In Britain, sanitary products are subject to VAT, yet there are no legal safeguards governing their manufacture or labelling; only voluntary agreements exist between the Department of Health, Department of Trade and the Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturers (ASPM). This does not represent all manufacturers.

Since 1989 Women's Environmental Network has highlighted the dangers of chlorine-bleached pulp for use in sanitary protection products. Disposable sanitary towels have started to be made using alternative pulp, although the problem of organochlorine pollution has not been eliminated.

The disposal of sanitary products also creates serious environmental hazards. Millions of plastic strips from sanitary towels are dumped into the sea via sewage outfalls, where they remain in the environment indefinitely, causing visible pollution and harming wildlife. Tampons can take 6 months to biodegrade in the sea and plastic lasts indefinitely. As a result of pressure to change disposal instructions, manufacturers are increasingly recognising the problems caused by flushing and are moving towards recommending disposal through household waste. However some manufacturers still give us the option to flush.

Overpackaging of sanitary products is increasing, wasting energy and resources, and adding to the non-biodegradable waste in landfill sites. Despite product-whiteness and the trend towards individual packaging, sanitary protection products are **not** sterile.



Tampons are convenient and contain no plastic, but are **not** necessarily safe. Made from cotton grown with the use of pesticides, many tampons also contain rayon, the production of which uses chlorine gas, and gives rise to dioxins. Concern is growing about the health effects of pesticide residues in tampons, as well as about possible links between dioxin residues and some cancers in women. Research has shown many other health risks associated with tampon use.

Tampon-related Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS), has killed at least 12 women in Britain since it was first identified in 1978. Following pressure from the Women's Environmental Network, tampon manufacturers have now agreed to provide on-pack warnings about TSS, starting from March 1993. However, little independent information is available about the risks, meaning that women cannot make informed choices about using tampons.

In recent years many new disposable 'feminine hygiene' products have become available, including items marketed for 'everyday protection', encouraging us to use them even when we are not bleeding. Meanwhile there is a growing movement of women who are trying out and making reusable forms of sanitary protection, as a practical, symbolic step towards lessening the impact we have, on our environment.

The Women's Environmental Network Trust is a Registered Charity educating, informing and empowering women who care about the environment.

The WEN Trust Information Department answers inquiries, produces briefings, papers and other information related to women and the environment.

For further details contact:  
Information Officer,  
WEN,  
Aberdeen Studios,  
22 Highbury Grove,  
London N5 2EA

Tel: 071 354 8823  
Fax: 071354 0464

Printed on recycled paper.

The WEN Trust Information Department gratefully acknowledges the support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Department of

# The Sanitary Protection Market

The first commercial disposable sanitary towel was made in the 1880s, costing the same price as a pair of shoes. Nurses returning from the First World War later popularised the use of disposable dressings for menstruation, but this was still regarded as an expensive luxury. In 1933 the disposable tampon was patented, but many British women still used homemade, washable protection well into the 1950s. By 1990 however, the UK market for disposable towels and tampons was worth £160 million, with virtually nobody using reusable ones.

With a declining population, the number of menstruating women in Britain has fallen, yet we are buying more sanitary protection today than ever. The 1992 market is worth £200 million. The highest unit cost per towel is almost 20p compared to about 8p in 1989. This is partly due to the increasing cost of advertising.

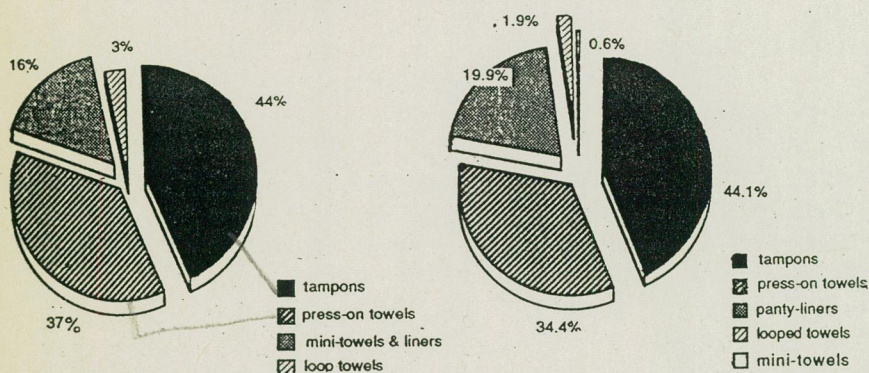
Menstruation products have always been advertised in the women's press. TV advertising was prohibited until 1986. Now it is commonplace, but restrictions on 'offence' grounds mean that blood is portrayed as blue. Women's complaints about embarrassment led the Independent Television Commission to restrict such advertising to non-family viewing times from May 1992.

Overall, the market is split between 55% external and 45% internal sanitary products, with 60% of women keeping to the same brand.

Patterns of sanitary protection-use change throughout women's lives, and differ among various groups of women, depending on age, class and ethnicity. For example, women aged between 18 to 24, together with those in the highest socio-economic groups, generally choose tampons, unlike younger teenagers. But women who have recently given birth, or who are close to the menopause, prefer towels.

Product innovation also has an influence on our purchasing habits. With the introduction of sanitary towel 'wings,' the market is again changing, reaching saturation point. Panty-liners represent the only dynamic area of growth, so that their introduction has swelled the external sanitary protection market by 25% since the early '80s. Many women suffer from mild stress-incontinence, for example when coughing. Often women use panty-liners continuously, instead of seeking medical help for this curable problem.

Sanitary Production Market for 1989 and 1992



## Super-absorbents

The new generation of super-thin towels contains super-absorbent materials such as polyacrylate gels, which are also used in disposable nappies. The non-biodegradable gel absorbs many times its own weight in liquid which cannot flow out again, even under pressure. LD50 tests on animals, and human trials, have led to claims that the toxicity is low, but health risks are involved for those working in the manufacture of these gels. Contact with the eyes may cause irritation and temporary corneal injury. Inhalation may cause lung damage. No independent research exists concerning the effects on women's health. Alternatives to gels include processed sphagnum moss, extraction of which depletes endangered ecosystems.

## Rayon

Many tampons are made from a blend of cotton and rayon, providing a more absorbent mix. Rayon is also used in some towels. This is a synthetic fibre, made from woodpulp obtained from eucalyptus plantations in countries like Indonesia and South Africa, and trees in temperate rainforests of the Pacific Northwest as well as tropical rainforests. The pulp is processed by delignification which breaks down fibres and removes oils. This normally involves chlorine gas or chlorinated compounds which cause dioxin and other organochlorine pollution around rayon mills.

Traces of dioxins have been found in British tampons. Although other rayon processing technologies are available, there is no evidence that any British sanitary ware contains chlorine-free rayon.

# Sanitary towels

Until 1989 disposable towels were made from 100% chlorine-bleached paper pulp. This bleaching process gives rise to highly dangerous chemicals, including dioxins and up to one thousand other organochlorine compounds. The US Government Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recently concluded that dioxin does cause cancer in humans, and that some responses to dioxin may have no safe level.

When paper pulp is produced, organochlorine compounds are released into seas and rivers, and tiny concentrations remain in the products themselves. Since these dangers were publicised, manufacturers have started to produce towels using alternatively bleached pulp. Various processes are now used, but product-labelling is unclear. Chemo Thermo Mechanical Pulp (CTMP) is an environmentally safer process, using hydrogen peroxide as a bleach. Other methods, sometimes confusingly called 'oxygen-bleaching', use chlorine dioxide which contains up to 10% residual chlorine gas, so that organochlorine pollution is reduced, not eliminated. Some companies have started to use recycled pulp in towels, although this usually means using pre-consumer waste from the production process.

Towels generally have leakproof, plastic backing strips. The non-woven, fabric covering on the outside called the coverstock, is generally made from non-biodegradable polypropylene and / or polyethylene, and sometimes with other fibres like cotton. Increasingly towels are individually wrapped in polyethylene and card, which rarely have a high recycled content.



## Cotton

All tampons and some towels contain cotton. Some tampons are 100% cotton. As a cash crop, cotton takes up 5% of the world's productive land, half the area of non-food crops in more than 70 countries including the USA and the Sudan.

Intensive cotton production causes soil degradation. Integrated pest management systems based on ecological understanding are making slow progress among cotton growers. Little organic cotton is available. In the developing world, 50% of pesticides are used on cotton but resistant pests have multiplied. Meanwhile pesticide poisoning of workers is common, with sprays drifting to surrounding areas, contaminating soil, groundwater and other crops. Many pesticides used in developing countries such as organochlorines like DDT and carbamates, are banned elsewhere. Some are known carcinogens.

Cotton used in British tampons is bleached with hydrogen peroxide and sodium hypochlorite.

## Disposable?

It is offence to discharge into sewers anything that 'interferes with the free flow' of its contents (Section 27(a) of the Public Health Act). However with a few exceptions, sanitary product labelling gives instructions to dispose by flushing. Manufacturers have indicated that their responsibility ends with the 'disappearance' of their product. One estimate suggests that 75% of blocked drains are caused by sanitary products, as 66% of UK women flush away towels and tampons, unlike other European countries where flushing is rare. Water and sewage authorities are spending more money removing growing amounts of sanitary products from sewage. The cost is passed on to the public.

Increasingly smaller sewage screens and maceration processes are required to remove tampons and towels and to ensure that the plastic liners or other recognisable debris, do not reach watercourses or remain in sewage sludge. Cleaned sewage screenings are incinerated in some areas, but are usually sent to landfill sites.

Some sewage sludge is used on agricultural land as fertiliser. Sewage treatment facilities vary greatly around the country. Sanitary products block narrow pipes. Heavy rain can cause premature discharge of raw sewage intended for treatment, directly into watercourses. In some areas untreated sewage is pumped directly into rivers and the sea. While tampons will eventually biodegrade, plastic liners from towels remain in the environment indefinitely. Plastic tampon applicators pose a similar hazard. Five million sea birds and 100,000 marine mammals including turtles and whales are estimated to die each year from swallowing plastic. Water authorities are now suggesting it would be better to dispose of sanitary products directly through household waste. If all towels were disposed of this way, they would make up only 0.03% of household waste. Incineration of used sanitary products is not a safe option as the burning of rubbish is a major source of dioxins in the environment.

## Tampon Absorbency

If you are using tampons, the lowest possible absorbency for your flow, is an essential safety step. However in the UK, tampon absorbencies are not regulated or standardised, unlike the USA, Canada and Australia. This means that British tampons cannot be compared across brands for absorbency, although some manufacturers have started to display their own absorbency tables on packs, in grammes of liquid absorbed per tampon.

## Tampons

### Possible Health Risks

Since 1918 it has been known that toxins can be absorbed into the body through the vagina. Little is known about the possible health effects of dioxin and pesticide residues in tampons. No British tampon manufacturer has released the results of pesticide residue tests. Experts have voiced concern about possible links between dioxin residues and uterine cancers.

## Proven Health Risks from Tampons

Tampons absorb about 65% menstrual blood and 35% other vaginal secretions. They cause vaginal dryness which can lead to epithelial layering, (peeling of the mucous membrane). Up to 1 in 5 tampon users may suffer from micro-ulcerations. This appears to be a transient effect, healing between monthly bleeding, but little is known about the long term effects of such recurring damage. Micro-ulcerations can develop into vaginal ulcers and can increase bleeding. Prolonged tampon use and higher absorbencies increase the risk of ulceration and up to 75% of women experience some form of alteration to the mucous membrane. Fibres shed from tampons have been found incorporated in vaginal walls.

## Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

Tampon-related TSS was first made public in the USA in 1980. The disease is related to tampon absorbency, although all brands and sizes pose a risk.

TSS is caused by a toxin known as TSST-1 which is produced by a strain of the normally harmless bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus*, occurring in about 30% of the population at any one time. It is naturally found in warm, moist parts of the body, including the vagina. The precise mechanism of the onset of TSS is not fully understood, but tampon use causes a variety of changes to the vagina which can create a biological environment encouraging the production of TSST-1.

Because TSS is not a notifiable disease in the UK, no reliable statistics exist. Information from the Public Health Laboratory Service indicates that there may be about 20 full-blown tampon-related cases a year, but research by WEN suggests that the true figure may be much higher. In addition, to meet the case definition criteria for TSS, women have to be critically ill, so milder cases or those treated quickly, are never included in these statistics.

In the USA there are up to 17 cases a year of tampon-related TSS for every 100,000 menstruating women. The risk is higher for women under 34 than for older women, although women of all ages can suffer from TSS. In the under 25s, 65% of cases occur, with one third aged 15-19 at most risk. The fatality rate may be as high as 13%. At least 12 women in the UK have died from tampon-related TSS since 1978, and nearly 200 are known to have survived the disease, often left with permanent health effects or disabilities. It is also possible to suffer from mild, recurring TSS with up to one third of sufferers likely to get it again.

### Symptoms of TSS

are flu-like and include:

- \* A high temperature around 102 F
- \* Vomiting
- \* Diarrhoea
- \* Sore throat
- \* Aching muscles
- \* Headache / stiff, tender neck
- \* Dizziness and fainting
- \* Sunburn-like rash.

The acute phase starts with a rapid loss of blood pressure (hypotension), and respiratory failure. TSS affects all of the body's major organ systems. Liver and kidney problems following TSS are not unknown. Necrosis, a decay of cells caused by poor blood supply, can cause the loss of fingers, toes and limbs. The after effects almost always include hair loss, fingernail and toenail loss, shedding skin, double vision, headaches and a loss of concentration and memory. These effects can last up to a year. Some women never recover completely, and are left suffering with deafness, arthritis and other health problems.

## TSS Warnings

Since 1981 British tampon leaflets have included information about TSS. In 1990 the ASPM introduced packaging notices to remind women to read these leaflets. In July 1992, following parliamentary concern, consumer pressure and independent moves by Natracare and the Co-op, the ASPM announced that its member companies would introduce clear on-pack warnings about TSS, bringing the UK into line with the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

## How to Avoid Tampon-related TSS:

The only way to eliminate the risk of developing tampon-related TSS or any other tampon-related health effect is to avoid using tampons altogether. There is no completely safe way to use tampons.

- **Avoid** high-absorbency tampons which carry a higher risk of TSS. Use the lowest absorbency tampon. Change it every 4 to 6 hours, during the night too.
- **Use** a sanitary towel instead of a tampon overnight.
- **Alternate** towels and tampons as much possible. Continuous tampon use increases the risk of TSS.
- **Keep** tampons clean and dry. Always wash your hands before and after changing a tampon.
- **Always** read the leaflet in a new box of tampons.
- **If** you experience any of these symptoms remove your tampon. Consult a doctor immediately. Take this briefing with you!
- **Never** use a tampon when not having a period.

## Reusable Sanitary Protection

For some years there has been a growing movement of women in the USA and Canada interested in reusable sanitary protection. This is echoed in the UK with overwhelming demand for the one available brand of washable sanitary towel on the market. Other women are making their own towels in favourite colours and fabrics. This makes periods more pleasurable and creative, is cheaper, and more environmentally friendly.

Another popular, reusable form is the natural sea sponge, but sponges have also been linked to TSS as they are absorbent and worn internally. The harvesting of this living creature damages the marine environment and there is concern about chemical residues in sponges, which filter sea water in order to feed.

An internally worn rubber cup, cap or diaphragm, can also be used to collect or temporarily block menstrual bleeding. However, the safety of such practices is unclear. Diaphragms have also been linked with TSS, and although there is little research available about this, women in Australia are being advised not to use diaphragms for more than four hours while menstruating.

## What You Can Do

- **If** you suffer from painful periods, try not using tampons for a while and see if things improve.
- **Choose** towels with minimum packaging and avoid individually wrapped products.
- **Look** for chlorine-free products and those without plastic liners or applicators.
- **Dispose** of your towels or tampons carefully, and never flush or incinerate them.
- **Pelvic** floor exercises are fun! Ask at your doctor's surgery or contact women's health organisations for details on how to improve muscle tone to help control or avoid incontinence.
- **Try** reusable sanitary towels.
- **Always** check on-pack information carefully. Write to the companies for clarification if you wish.
- **If** you have experienced TSS or any other problem with tampons, contact WEN and let us know. This will help us to raise awareness of these issues.

## Further Reading

**The Sanitary Protection Scandal:** Costello, Valley, Young. Women's Environmental Network, 1989. Available from WEN at £6.95 plus £1 p&p.

**Why Me God?** Miriam Murphy, a survivor of tampon-related Toxic Shock Syndrome. 1992. Available from WEN at £5 plus £1 p&p.

**Chlorine, Pollution and our Environment:** WEN briefing. Send an SAE to WEN.

**The Wise Wound:** Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove. Paladin. Published 1978. Revised edition 1986.

## Reusable Sanitary Protection

**Ecofem** washable sanitary towels are available from Ganmill Ltd, 38-40 Market Street, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 3EP.

**The Keeper**, a reusable rubber menstrual cup is marketed in the USA. Write to: The Keeper, Box 20023, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA.

NOW AVAILABLE FROM THE KEEPER (UK),  
PO Box 616, BRISTOL, BS99 5UN. £25 (inc. p&p)

The Women's Environmental Network Trust is one of Britain's leading environmental charities. WEN aims to educate, inform and empower women who care about the environment.

Membership entitles you to receive our quarterly newsletter and to be informed of all events.  
Subscription rates:  
Supporting £30      Affiliation £35  
Individual £13      Overseas £20  
Unwaged £7

Acknowledgements:  
Researched and written by Julie Cook and assisted by Ann Link and Sue Tibballs. Illustrated by Angela Martin. Edited and desk top published by Yolanda Christian.

## **Appendix 4.**

E-mail



**Sara Cox \***

---

**From:** lesley ann jones  
**To:** SARA.COX  
**Subject:** for Assumpta Sweeney  
**Date:** 30 October 1995 17:16

In response to your request posted to ecofem mailing list:

I do not purchase sanitary products because I do not want to use bleached products in such a sensitive area. I also feel that sanitary products have psychological implications (bleeding is 'dirty' and we must hide it) and economic implications (women have to have something to catch the flow so why not be the company who catches all the dollars for them.) that I find unpleasant.

My alternatives are sponges and cloth pads. Sponges: I use natural sea sponges. I only use one for one period's amount of time and then dispose of it by flushing it down the toilet. When the sponge fills with blood, I rinse it in cold water and re-insert. Cost = about \$2 american. (box of tampons that will last for one period = about \$5 american)

Cloth pads: I either put a folded handkerchief in my underwear or fasten a folded handkerchief into a belt designed to hold sanitary pads. If I will be away from home when I need to change pads, I carry a plastic baggy to put the used pad in. I rinse the handkerchief out in cold water as soon as possible and run them through the laundry with the other wash. I have read a book called "Hygeiea" which describes a home-made cloth belt and pad system that I intend to sew up when I get some extra time and fabric. It looks very comfortable.

If you need to ask any other questions or if you would like me to look up the author, ISBN, etc. of the book I mentioned, just send me some e-mail. Thanks and good luck with your research -- as you can tell, I feel that you are looking into a very important topic.

lesley ann jones

lajonez1@ulkyvm.louisville.edu



# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BOOKS

ALVARADO, Scilla and POWER, Paula.

LDA, 1993

The Inside Story:

Menstruation Education for Young  
Men and Women.

BAILEY, Ronald. H

promotional booklet

commissioned and published by Tambrands Ltd.

Small Wonder

de BEAUVOIR, Simone

Jonathan Cape Ltd., Great Britain, 1949

The Second Sex

DOUGLAS, Mary.

Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., London, 1966

Purity and Danger

GOSZ, Elizabeth

Indiana University Press, USA, 1984

Volatile Bodies

KUPFERMANN, Jeannette

Robson Books Ltd., Great Britain, 1979

The MsTaken Body

LAWS, Sophie.

The Mac Millan Press Ltd., 1990

Issues of Blood

MILES, Rosalind

Penguin Group, London, 1988

The Women's History of The World



OWEN, Lara.  
The Aquarian Press, London, 1993

Her Blood Is Gold

PARVATI, Jeanine.  
London, 1972

Hygieia: A Woman's Herbal

SHORTER, Edward.  
Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1982

A History of Women's Bodies

SHUTTLE, P. and REDGROVE, P.  
Victor Gollancz Ltd. Great Britain, 1978

The Wise Wound

TRENEMAN, Ann "Cashing in on the Curse"  
GAMMAN, Lorraine. and MARSHMENT, Margaret. (Eds)  
The Women's Press Ltd.  
London, 1988

The Female Gaze

WEIDEGGER, Paula.  
The Woman's Press, London, 1978

Female Cycles

WHITELEY, Nigel  
Reaktion Books Ltd, London, 1993

Design For Society



---

## JOURNALS

BENNET, Oliver, "Extra Sensitive Perception", Creative Review,  
Vol. II, No. 12, December 1991, p.27-28

COLES, Jo, "Perfect Periods?", Warwick Boar,  
Vol. 16, Issue 17, 01.03.94, p. 8

FINN, Judith A, "The Tampon Debate", Woman's Health,  
Nov/Dec 1991

HOUPPERT, Karen, "Embarrassed to Death" The Village Voice,  
Vol. XL No 6, 07.02.95, p. 32

Market Research Great Britain. "Sanpro"  
July 1995, p. 133-154  
January 1993, p. 85 - 101  
February 1991, p. 19 - 27

MOORE, H. and RAIN, M. "Tampons and Towels." Which? magazine,  
July 1994.

---

## UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

Mc LEAR, Anne. "How modern sanitary wear advertising is used as a tool  
in the oppression of women"

Presented to the Annual Conference of the UK Women's Studies  
Association at Stirling University in June 1995.

---

## FILM

CAMPION, Jane (Director) An Angel At My Table  
Hibiscus Films, New Zealand, 1990



## TELEVISION

BROOME, Kate (producer)

BBC 2, 04.11.93

Small Objects of Desire:

The Tampon

## THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Glad Rags

[info@gladragss.com](mailto:info@gladragss.com)

S.P.O.T directory

<http://critpath.org/~tracy/spot.html>

The Keeper

<http://www.keeper.com/keeper>

