

The Lululemon Controversy Explained

by

Samvida Chennuri

Fashion Revolution Canada

2024

When we think of Lululemon, we picture yoga tights that have become a staple in almost everyone's wardrobe. While many attribute the brand's success to high-quality products, founder Dennis J. "Chip" Wilson attributes it to being the ["only straight guy" designing apparel for women and knowing "what a guy likes."](#)

Controversies and Initial Issues:

Since its inception, the Vancouver-based brand has faced controversy. In March 2013, the company recalled [one-fifth of their black Luon pants](#) due to complaints of them being see-through. After the brand suggested customers may not be purchasing the right size, Wilson made tone-deaf remarks about the pilling issue and [blamed women's bodies](#). He later issued a superficial [apology](#) and soon resigned as chairman, subsequently resigning as a board member in 2015. Since then, Lululemon has tried to distance itself from him and rehabilitate its image.

Greenwashing and Environmental Claims:

In the context of new anti-greenwashing legislation and Bill C-59 which received Royal Assent in June 2024, Lululemon has come under fire for its "Be Planet" marketing campaign. Canada's [Competition Bureau launched a probe into Lululemon's environmental claims](#) after the advocacy group [Stand. Earth filed a complaint accusing it of deceiving customers](#). The Be Planet initiative, launched in 2020, claimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but data from Lululemon's own [Impact Report 2022](#) showed otherwise, stating that they use 100% renewable energy in their owned and operated facilities (Scope 1 and Scope 2) without mentioning that this makes up only 0.3% of their total emissions. Meanwhile, the company's Scope 3 emissions, which comprise the remaining 99.7%, have doubled since 2020, when they released their inaugural Impact Report.

On top of that, the environmental group [Actions Speak Louder \(ASL\) published a six-month investigation into Lululemon's textile supply chain](#), revealing the negative ecological impacts of the brand, which include pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and a heavy reliance on fossil fuels. Amid greenwashing claims, [Lululemon has been working with the public relations firm Edelman](#) to manage reputational damage. Edelman itself has strong fossil fuel industry ties and faces a possible federal investigation for alleged greenwashing.

Sustainability Claims and Team Canada Apparel:

Currently, Lululemon is the official outfitter for Canadian Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Despite its sustainability claims, most materials used in their [Team Canada apparel](#) are polyester, nylon, elastane, cotton, and some recycled polyester and nylon. On their website, [the brand says it aims to use 75% recycled polyester and source 100% cotton from sustainable sources by 2025](#), but currently, there is no information about how they are in line with achieving these targets. Their use of recycled polyester from discarded bottles, known as open-loop recycling, is not ideal as it eventually leads to waste. Engaging in closed-loop recycling would be best as it would allow for material reuse within the same production chain.

Looking ahead:

Lululemon has a massive platform as one of the largest Canadian apparel companies and the official outfitter for the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic teams. Therefore, they must be transparent in disclosing information about their environmental impact. Since a bulk of emissions come from Scope 3, meaning its supply chain and raw materials, Lululemon needs to start working with suppliers who have set climate targets and are diligently working toward meeting them. Additionally, building community engagement programs with their suppliers will help understand and support the local ecosystem better. The brand must also fast-track its innovation efforts to find alternatives to synthetic fabrics. By committing to these goals, Lululemon can avoid greenwashing and meet the environmental targets it has set for itself.