



EARTH-FRIENDLY TEXTILES

How Environmentally Responsible Are They?

BREAKING NEWS

The FTC sent letters to 78 retailers, including REI, Target and Wal-Mart warning the stores that they might be breaking the law by carrying bamboo products labeled as having environmental and performance claims that the government thinks are false. ***SEE MORE DETAILS INSIDE***

To read the full article visit: www.snewsnet.com/cgi-bin/snews/17286.html

Why question earth-friendly textiles?

The vast amount of research we have done on the subject of sustainable textiles was prompted by our awareness of legal action taken by two major US organizations regarding “greenwashing” and false claims made about the content of so-called earth-friendly products.

Greenwashing – refers to companies falsely representing themselves as providing “eco-friendly” products by having a “green” name, when in reality their products are not made from recycled or sustainable materials.

False claims – many companies promote their products as “eco-friendly” – through marketing materials, web presence, and content labels – when in fact, they are not.

Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

The Federal Trade Commission is an independent government agency whose sole purpose is to protect consumers from unfair business practices. Consumers reported to the FTC having made purchases made from companies with “green” claims in their names, advertising, labeling, etc., – implying that they sell only green products – but receiving products that were not environmentally responsible. In response, the FTC investigated and discovered these companies had misrepresented their products. The FTC has issued requirements, known as The Green Guides, that specify the rules and regulations on environmentally friendly product claims. The FTC requires substantiation of all claims, which could be in the form of tests, analyses, research, studies or other evidence based on the expertise of professionals in relevant areas.

For further information on the Green Guides as well as information about the crackdown on greenwashing, please visit:

<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/reporter/greengds.shtm>

<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/08/bamboo.shtm>

US Customs

Since the duty for bamboo entering the country is half the duty of poly, and since to the naked eye bamboo and poly products look and feel very similar, US Customs began investigating apparel imports with content labels claiming to consist of bamboo fiber and/or bamboo charcoal. They discovered that a vast majority contained no bamboo at all, and those that did contained so little that they did not meet the qualification for reduced duty (51% bamboo content).

This information is posted online at

www.lesliejordan.com/EarthTextiles.pdf

Bamboo

If you have been searching for earth-friendly textile options, chances are you have heard about bamboo. In some industries, bamboo does have environmental benefits, but when it comes to textiles, the bamboo options aren't as environmentally responsible as you might think.

Why isn't bamboo fiber considered earth friendly?

In reality, bamboo fiber is nothing more than rayon, and the process it takes to make the cellulose from the bamboo plant is toxic and environmentally damaging.

"To make rayon from bamboo or any cellulose source, it is typically ground up, dissolved and processed into a viscous liquid with chemicals such as the highly toxic carbon disulfide. It is much more energy intensive and much more polluting."

– Chris Pastore, Professor of Textile Engineering at Philadelphia University.

"The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, wants you to know that the soft 'bamboo' fabrics on the market today are rayon. They are made using toxic chemicals in a process that releases pollutants into the air. Extracting bamboo fibers is expensive and time-consuming, and textiles made just from bamboo fiber don't feel silky smooth."

– FTC Consumer Alert, <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt160.shtm>

The FTC has issued letters to 78 companies warning that they may be breaking the law by selling products advertised as being made from bamboo, but in reality are simply rayon. The letter states that "Rayon, even if manufactured using cellulose from bamboo, must be described using an appropriate term recognized under the FTC's Textile Rules... Failing to properly label and advertise textiles misleads consumers and runs afoul of both the Textile Rules and the FTC Act."

What is bamboo charcoal?

Is it any better for the environment than bamboo fiber?

Bamboo charcoal comes from bamboo plants that are dried and heated at high heats until it forms charcoal – which is not earth friendly. The charcoal particles are then embedded into existing textile fibers. The amount of bamboo charcoal embedded into the fibers is typically 2% or less, which is not enough to make a product eligible to be classified as "earth-friendly." In addition, bamboo charcoal is often embedded into fibers that are not environmentally conscious, thereby negating any environmental benefits the charcoal may offer.

Do textiles made from bamboo fiber or bamboo charcoal offer natural wicking or antimicrobial properties?

According to the Federal Trade Commission, they do not. The rayon manufacturing process used to create bamboo fiber eliminates any of the original properties of the plant. Furthermore, the amount of bamboo charcoal included in textiles – usually 2% – is insufficient to offer any antimicrobial properties.

RECYCLED POLY

Recycled polyester has become another popular option when looking for a viable earth-friendly performance textile. Manufacturers of recycled poly claim that it offers many benefits, such as reducing waste going to landfills, minimizing demand for petroleum products, and decreasing environmental impacts from the processing of petroleum into virgin polyester.

What is recycled poly?

Recycled poly is a fiber made from recycled plastic containers. There are two types of waste materials from which recycled polyester is made: post-consumer and pre-consumer waste. Post-consumer materials are items that have actually been used previously – such as a used soda bottle. Pre-consumer waste refers to manufacturing scrap that, if not re-introduced back into the manufacturing process, would otherwise go into the waste stream. A manufacturer must be able to prove that the pre-consumer waste would eventually end up in the waste stream if it were not recycled.

What are the problems with Recycled Poly?

The main issue with recycled poly is that many products are marketed as such, but are not accompanied by sufficient evidence of the true amount of recycled content. Since recycled poly and regular poly look and feel the same, a company must prove the actual content of the textile is, in fact, recycled poly. To be able to claim that a textile is made from recycled content, the actual percentage must be specified. Additionally, it must be indicated whether or not the recycled content comes from pre- or post-consumer waste.

“The demand for used bottles, from which recycled polyester fiber is made, is now outstripping supply in some areas. So certain cynical suppliers are now buying NEW, unused bottles directly from bottle producing companies to make polyester textile fiber that can be called ‘recycled.’”

-Eco-Textile News, <http://www.ecotextile.com/>

There are companies that will certify manufacturers of yarns made from recycled materials. However, certification must be accompanied by information that explains its basis and proves that certifying party is truly independent from the manufacturer and has professional expertise in the particular area.

Leslie Jordan's Views on Recycled Poly

Although we have been working with mills who have offered us recycled poly at almost the same price as regular poly, these mills are unable to provide us with concrete evidence and valid certificates that their textiles are made from at least 50% recycled poly content. We do not think it is ethical for us to market a product that we cannot verify is environmentally responsible. We do continue to pursue many mills and factories for authentic recycled poly at competitive pricing and will notify you when it's available.

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