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INV 50901

# Before You Buy Clothing, Read the Labels

## Leader Resource

**C**lothing is constantly changing as fibers, yarns, fabrics, dyes, and finishes change. Labels are intended to provide information for consumers at the point of purchase. Labels disclosing the fiber content of clothing and permanent care labels are both required by law. Other information may be provided by manufacturers to help consumers make purchase decisions. Consumers need to read, understand, and use the labels.

## Objectives

- Identify the two types of required labels (fiber content labels and permanent care labels) for clothing. Locate and examine examples of both types. Locate and examine examples of voluntary label information.
- Seek and read required labels before purchasing clothing. Use label information in purchase decision.

## Reference and Handout

*Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source*, 4-H 92135. No charge.

### *Optional Reference*

*Dyeing & Colorfastness in Fabrics*, 4-H 92161, \$1.00

## Preparation for Teaching

1. Read Leader Guide and reference publications.
2. Choose at least five activities for your group. Gather garments with labels or ask participants to bring garments with labels.
3. Prepare for activities by gathering suggested supplies, duplicating handouts, or finding examples.

## Introduction

How many persons remember when the only fabrics available were cotton, linen, silk, and wool? Does anyone remember when the most up-to-date fabric was a stiff, thick polyester double knit? Who can recognize stone-washed or acid washed jeans?

There are many changes in clothing over the past two or three generations. Consumers will obtain more value for the clothing dollar by reading labels, following the care instructions, and reporting incorrect labels.

Before beginning the program, we are going to take a few minutes to complete a "Care Label Quiz" (page 5). We want to find out what your care label I.Q. is before the program. Read each statement, decide whether it's true or false, and circle T for true or F for false on the left side of the page. Put the page aside until the end of the program.

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*Ardis W. Koester, Extension textiles and clothing specialist emeritus, Oregon State University.*



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## Activities

### 1. *Getting acquainted with content labels*

There are three types of content labels that contain similar information. They are:

- Textile Fiber Products Identification
- Wool Products
- Fur Products

The information they provide is:

- What the product is made of
- The components of the product
- Manufacturer
- Country(ies) of origin

List briefly the four types of information described in *Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source* and ask participants to share what they find on the label examples. Look at labels on garments that participants are wearing, garments you have brought from home, or garments borrowed from a store.

Are there any labels that do not comply with the requirements for labels?

### 2. *Examining and comparing content labels*

Refer to *Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source* for background on generic and trade or brand names. Examine content labels for generic fiber names and trade names. Make a list in each generic fiber group, by asking the participants for information from the labels. If a trade name is given, list that also. If known, write the date of purchase of each garment.

Generic fiber names are not capitalized while trade names are. Examples of fiber names include cotton, polyester, nylon and rayon. Trade names include Greenvista, Dacron, Hydrofil, and Zantrel. What are the advantages and disadvantages of unbranded fibers?

### 3. *Trends in textiles and apparel*

To prepare for this activity, look for articles in newspapers and news magazines related to textiles and clothing. There may be articles about imports and trade quotas, articles about legislation and congressional decisions related to farm conditions, or news about designers and fashion trends.

Purchase or borrow several magazines for sports activities that require specialized clothing. Look for magazines directed toward running, skiing, bicycling, or swimming. Look for advertisements related to clothing and the protection, comfort, mobility, and function that specialized clothing provides. Because of the popularity of sports and the money consumers are willing to spend, much of the research and development in textiles is related to sports clothing.

The trends may be influenced by (list these on butcher paper or a flip chart):

**Technology**—research and design development.

Examples: Breathable, rain resistant fabrics; microfiber variations; increased comfort

**Politics**—international trade and legislation.

Examples: Imported fibers such as ramie, linen, silk; imported garments; trade regulations and quotas

**Economics**—supply, demand, advertising, weather conditions.

Examples: Natural fiber such as cotton, wool, silk; Crafted with Pride, Woolmark, Cotton logo

**Social**—lifestyles, geography, availability, fashion

Examples: Comfortable fabrics such as fleece, heavy or lightweight fabrics; stonewashed denims; cashmere fibers

Ask participants to describe a technological, political, or economic or social trend from the example labels, garments, and dates of purchase.

### 4. *The importance of permanent care labels*

a. Ask participants if they would share an example of a disaster in caring for a garment. Were they following what the label said to do? Examples might include machine washing a sweater that was labeled hand wash, washing a garment that was labeled dry clean, and washing a garment with other items that was labeled wash separately.

If you followed the care label and the result was a disaster, you have a legitimate complaint. The FTC recommends you return the garment to the store (with the receipt if possible) and explain what happened. (See Activities 8 and 9.)

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b. Discuss the costs (to the manufacturer, to the retailer, and to the consumer) of the permanent care labels. Discuss the benefits.

5. *Using and following permanent care labels*

a. Using the information in *Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source*, list items that must have care labels. Make another list of items that are not required to have care labels.

b. Care labels are required to have full instructions for one method of care that is safe. Alternative methods of care are not necessary. Why would manufacturers use "Dry Clean Only" for some garments that can be laundered? Explain the system of warnings.

c. A problem in caring for clothing is related to the care labels. Manufacturers are required to list only one safe method, even if other methods of care are also safe. This leads consumers to doubt the care labels. Some manufacturers put "Dry Clean Only" labels on garments with the assumption dry cleaners know more about fabric care and the dry cleaning process will be easier on the garment. This problem is called "low labeling" because it reduces the risk that garments will be returned to the retailer or manufacturer. Do any of the participants have examples they believe were "low labeled?" Share and discuss the label.

6. *Reading care labels*

a. Ask participants who have examples of care labels requiring *machine washing* to stand up and bring the label to the front of the room. Next ask them to arrange themselves from the least informative label to the most informative label. Ask several participants to share the information found on the care labels. Each label may include information on the processes of washing, rinsing, drying, and ironing. Are there any unusual processes or recommendations? Are there any warnings noted? Thank the participants for the sharing and ask them to return to their places. Were there any terms that participants do not understand? (A copy of the terms and definitions is attached.)

b. Next ask participants who have examples of care labels requiring *hand washing* to stand up and bring the label to the front of the room. Ask

them to arrange themselves from the least informative label to the most informative label. Ask several participants to share the information found on the labels. The labels should include the same four processes as machine washing. The participants may sit down.

c. Ask all the participants who have examples of care labels requiring *dry cleaning* to stand up. Ask participants to share any care labels that include additional information for the dry cleaner. They may sit down.

d. Ask whether there are any labels containing the *international care symbols*. Describe what each of the symbols means. In the U.S. are the symbols required or voluntary?

e. Are there any other care labels such as "Do not wash, Do not dry clean"?

7. *Voluntary labels*

Types of voluntary labels are described in *Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source*. List them. Ask participants who have examples of the voluntary labels to share and describe the content of the label. Discuss the various purposes that these labels are filling.

8. *Using labels and being a responsible consumer*

Consumers have **rights** such as the right to be informed about the product being purchased. They also have **responsibilities** such as to read and follow the labels, then register a complaint to the retailer/manufacturer if the product does not perform as expected.

If anyone has had an unsatisfactory experience after following a care label, they should return the garment, with the sales receipt, to the retailer. Go first to the department head, then to the manager if the problem is not handled to your satisfaction. Satisfactory solutions may include garment replacement or credit for obtaining another garment.

As a last resort, write the manufacturer. If you do not know the address of the manufacturer, go to your local library and ask the reference librarian to help you. Or contact the state library in Salem, (503) 378-4277. The name of the manufacturer represented by an RN number may be obtained from an *RN & WPL Encyclopedia* or

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may be obtained from the publisher of the encyclopedia, the Salesman's Guide, Inc. (800) 223-1797.

Practice exercising a complaint. Divide the participants into small groups to either make a complaint to a store or write a letter of complaint on one of the example garments. Use the attached example letter.

9. *Participating in the improvement of labels*

Prepare for the next two activities by duplicating the sample forms attached to the leader resource. If possible, duplicate the IFI Care Label Survey on yellow paper.

A consumer may also wish to register a complaint to the Care Label Survey, International Fabricare Institute, 12251 Tech Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904. The form is attached to the Leader Guide and may be duplicated as needed for consumers. The International Fabricare Institute is collecting data to influence the Federal Trade Commission in strengthening the care label requirements.

Oregon State University conducted research on clothing and skin health and learned that labels are frequently scratchy or irritating to the skin or are unusually annoying. If anyone removes a care label, suggest the person write the care information on a card and file it by the washing machine for future reference.

10. *Selecting garments based on labels*

Discuss the relationship between lifestyles and age groups and various methods of clothing care. What lifestyles or age groups might prefer:

- Machine washing?
- Hand washing?
- Dry cleaning?

Lifestyles might include:

- Career person
- Homemaker or retired person
- Single person (male, female)
- Home ownership—with or without washer and dryer
- Apartment—with or without laundry room
- Shared living quarters such as a college dorm
- Traveling/vacationing activities
- Infants, children's, teens, college, elderly

## Summary

Clothing care begins when clothing is purchased. Look for the fiber content and permanent care labels when you purchase clothing. Read and follow the labels. If clothing does not perform as expected, you have a responsibility to make a complaint to the retailer and the manufacturer. Register a complaint also with the Federal Trade Commission and the International Fabricare Institute. The Permanent Care Labeling rule was changed in 1984 as a result of consumer complaints. Consumers can make a difference in the products available in the stores and in regulations affecting manufacturers.

Now let's see what you learned. Return to the "Care Label Quiz" and retake the quiz, circling the T or F on the right-hand side of the page. Go over the answers with the group (all are "true" except 3, 6, 7, and 10). Read the correct answers. For the correct answers for false statements, refer to the back of the page. Note how many participants improved their score as a result of the program.

## What is Your Care Label I.Q.?

**BEFORE** studying the lesson, look to the care label, take this true and false test. Read each statement carefully. Decide whether the statement is true or false. Then, on the left side of each statement, circle T or F.

**AFTER** studying the lesson, read the statements again. Decide whether the statement is true or false. Then, on the right side of each statement, circle T or F. Now compare your answers. Did your care label I.Q. improve as a result of having this lesson?

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## Care Label Quiz

### BEFORE LESSON

### AFTER LESSON

- |   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| T | F | 1. All textile wearing apparel (with a few exceptions) used to cover or protect the body should have care labels on them.  | T | F |
| T | F | 2. Stores are not required to provide care label with fabrics you buy for home sewing.   | T | F |
| T | F | 3. Care labels are necessary only when we can't find fiber content labels on a garment.  | T | F |
| T | F | 4. If a care label says a garment is washable, that means everything on the garment is washable.   | T | F |
| T | F | 5. Care labels are supposed to be visible at point of purchase, permanently attached and remain legible throughout the useful life of the garment.   | T | F |
| T | F | 6. Importers and manufacturers of textile wearing apparel are exempt from the Care Labeling Rule.  | T | F |
| T | F | 7. If the garment can be washed and dry cleaned, both care instructions must be on the label.  | T | F |
| T | F | 8. Hats, shoes, and gloves are not required to have care labels on them.   | T | F |
| T | F | 9. Disposable garments are not required to include any care instructions.  | T | F |
| T | F | 10. Coats and jackets are not required to have care labels on them.  | T | F |
| T | F | 11. If the directions on the care label were followed exactly, and some damage occurred to the garment, as a consumer it is your responsibility to write and complain to the manufacturer. | T | F |
| T | F | 12. Care labels tell you how to remove spots and stains.   | T | F |
| T | F | 13. Care labeling terms are based on a warning system.   | T | F |
| T | F | 14. If a care label says to machine wash a garment, you could wash it using hot water, a bleach, and a hot dryer.  | T | F |
| T | F | 15. If a care label says to wash a garment in cold water, you could wash it in hot water, too.   | T | F |

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### ***Corrections for False Statements in the Care Label Quiz***

3. According to the Care Label Rule, every garment sold in the United States (with a few exceptions) must carry a care label.
6. Importers and manufacturers of textile wearing apparel are *not* exempted from the Care Labeling Rule. The amended Care Label Rule specifically states that *all* manufacturers and importers of textile wearing apparel must include care labels that are *accurate* and that have a *reasonable basis* for the instructions given on the label.
7. No, if a garment can be cleaned using several methods, only a single method necessary for *normal use* and *enjoyment* of the garment needs to be listed.
10. Since coats and jackets protect the body, they *are* required to have care labels on them.

*Prepared by Ruth R. Gulbrandson, Clothing Specialist, NDSU Extension Service, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, September 1989*

## **Writing a Letter of Complaint**

Read the following letter of complaint. Review what should be included in a complaint letter. Using a problem that you have had or others have had, practice writing a letter of complaint. Work singly or in groups of three or four.

### ***Sample copy of a complaint letter***

	Your Address City, State, Zip Code Date
Complaint Department Company Name Street Address City, State, Zip Code	
Dear Sir or Madam (or To Whom It May Concern):	
I am writing about (describe the garment, care information on the label, specific care given to garment, and why garment was unsatisfactory).	
Unfortunately, this garment has not performed satisfactorily according to the stated care information. (Explain why it did not perform satisfactorily. Examples could be shrinkage, color loss.)	
In order to solve this problem, I would appreciate your (state the specific action you want, such as money returned or garment replaced).	
I am looking forward to your reply within the next 30 days.	
Sincerely,	
Your Name	

*Prepared by Ruth R. Gulbrandson, Clothing Specialist, NDSU Extension Service, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, September 1989.*



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# CARE LABEL SURVEY

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## HELP OVERCOME CARE LABEL PROBLEMS

In an effort to improve Care Labeling, IFI has been tracking the reasons for garment problems and failures. We regularly forward this data from garments analyzed in our lab to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for their review. The FTC has the authority to investigate violations of the Care Labeling Rule.

In addition to garment failures reported by cleaners, however, IFI has always wanted additional input from consumers, since many garments never reach our laboratory. This is potentially valuable information that can further FTC investigations.

Heloise, the nationally-syndicated consumer columnist, recently explained the problem of inaccurate labels. She asked consumers to share with her any concerns they had about problems they experienced. She was literally flooded with letters. However, it takes a long time to review these letters and systemize comments into a useful log.

To help gather information, we have created the form on the reverse side of this page. It is a survey to report failures possibly caused by inaccurate care labeling. This form is not to be used for either placing a claim or placing responsibility in settling a claim. It is hoped that whenever there is a garment failure possibly due to an incorrect label that the garment would be returned to the retailer or manufacturer; and that this form will be used. **Please DO NOT use this form if the garment is being sent to IFI for Garment Analysis.**

We ask that consumers and/or drycleaners help by having the form *completely and accurately* filled out and returned to IFI, Care Label Department. This information will be entered into the computer and shared with FTC and possibly with the clothing manufacturer. When possible, please fill in the consumer's name, address, and phone number. It is very important to include the RN #, if present. This identifies the manufacturer and is usually found on the care label.

Please help us make a greater impact to overcome the care label dilemma.

P.S. We encourage you to make copies of the survey form for additional consumer use.



INTERNATIONAL FABRICARE INSTITUTE  
12251 Tech Road Silver Spring, Maryland 20904  
The Association of Professional Drycleaners and Launderers

301/622-1900



# Consumer Care Label Survey

[ This survey cannot be used to assess responsibility or as a claim form. It is to be used for reporting failures possibly caused by inaccurate care labels. ]

CONSUMER     DRYCLEANER

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIPTION OF GARMENT

RN # \_\_\_\_\_ Import  USA   
Manufacturer/Label Name \_\_\_\_\_ Fiber Content \_\_\_\_\_  
Item (dress, suit, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_ Care Label Instructions \_\_\_\_\_  
Color \_\_\_\_\_  
Did you follow the care label?    Yes     No

### DRYCLEANER/LAUNDERER ESTABLISHMENT

Plant Name \_\_\_\_\_  
IFI Member?    Yes     No   
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

### HOW CARED FOR

Drycleaned  — Solvent Used: \_\_\_\_\_  
Washed  — Hand     Machine   
Leather Cleaned \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

### TYPE OF FAILURE

#### GENERAL

Color Altered in Drycleaning   
Color Altered in Washing   
Fusible Problem (uneven appearance)   
Shrinkage

#### TRIM

Beads     Buttons   
Sequins     Suede   
Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### SUEDE & LEATHER GARMENTS

Shrinkage     Defects in Skin   
Dye Loss

#### HOUSEHOLD ITEMS (Tablecloth, Drapes, etc.)

Color Loss   
Shrinkage   
Other \_\_\_\_\_

Other Damage/Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Fold here

Fold here

TO USE THIS FORM AS A SELF-MAILER: FOLD WHERE INDICATED SO THAT THE RETURN ADDRESS APPEARS ON THE OUTSIDE. USE TAPE TO SEAL.

PLACE STAMP  
HERE  
The Post Office  
will not deliver  
mail without  
postage

To: CARE LABEL SURVEY  
c/o International Fabricare Institute

# Glossary of Standard Terms

## 1. WASHING, MACHINE METHODS:

- a. **"Machine wash"**—a process by which soil may be removed from products or specimens through the use of water, detergent or soap, agitation and a machine designed for this purpose. When no temperature is given, e.g., "warm" or "cold," hot water up to 150°F (66°C) can be regularly used.
- b. **"Warm"**—initial water temperature setting 90° to 110°F (32° to 43°C) (hand comfortable).
- c. **"Cold"**—initial water temperature setting same as cold water tap up to 85°F (29°C).
- d. **"Do not have commercially laundered"**—do not employ a laundry which uses special formulations, sour rinses, extremely large loads or extremely high temperatures or which otherwise is employed for commercial, industrial or institutional use. Employ laundering methods designed for residential use or use in a self-service establishment.
- e. **"Small load"**—smaller than normal washing load.
- f. **"Delicate cycle"** or **"gentle cycle"**—slow agitation and reduced time.
- g. **"Durable press cycle"** or **"permanent press cycle"**—cool down rinse or cold rinse before reduced spinning.
- h. **"Separately"**—alone.
- i. **"With like colors"**—with colors of similar hue and intensity.
- j. **"Wash inside out"**—turn product inside out to protect face of fabric.
- k. **"Warm rinse"**—initial water temperature setting 90° to 110°F (32° to 43°C).
- l. **"Cold rinse"**—initial water temperature setting same as cold water tap up to 85°F (29°C).
- m. **"Rinse thoroughly"**—rinse several times to remove detergent, soap and bleach.
- n. **"No spin"** or **"Do not spin"**—remove material at start of final spin cycle.
- o. **"No wring"** or **"Do not wring"**—do not use roller wringer, nor wring by hand.

## 2. WASHING, HAND METHODS:

- a. **"Hand wash"**—a process by which soil may be manually removed from products or specimens through the use of water, detergent or soap, and gentle squeezing action. When no temperature is given, e.g., "warm" or "cold," hot water up to 150°F (66°C) can be regularly used.
- b. **"Warm"**—initial water temperature 90° to 110°F (32° to 43°C) (hand comfortable).
- c. **"Cold"**—initial water temperature same as cold water tap up to 85°F (29°C).
- d. **"Separately"**—alone.
- e. **"With like colors"**—with colors of similar hue and intensity.
- f. **"No wring or twist"**—handle to avoid wrinkles and distortion.

- g. **"Rinse thoroughly"**—rinse several times to remove detergent, soap and bleach.
- h. **"Damp wipe only"**—surface clean with damp cloth or sponge.

## 3. DRYING, ALL METHODS:

- a. **"Tumble dry"**—use machine dryer. When no temperature setting is given, machine drying at a hot setting may be regularly used.
- b. **"Medium"**—set dryer at medium heat.
- c. **"Low"**—set dryer at low heat.
- d. **"Durable press"** or **"Permanent press"**—set dryer at permanent press setting.
- e. **"No heat"**—set dryer to operate without heat.
- f. **"Remove promptly"**—when items are dry, remove immediately to prevent wrinkling.
- g. **"Drip dry"**—hang dripping wet with or without hand shaping and smoothing.
- h. **"Line dry"**—hang damp from line or bar in or out of doors.
- i. **"Line dry in shade"**—dry away from sun.
- j. **"Line dry away from heat"**—dry away from heat.
- k. **"Dry flat"**—lay out horizontally for drying.
- l. **"Block to dry"**—reshape to original dimensions while drying.
- m. **"Smooth by hand"**—by hand, while wet, remove wrinkles, straighten seams and facings.

## 4. IRONING AND PRESSING:\*

- a. **"Iron"**—Ironing is needed. When no temperature is given iron at the highest temperature setting may be regularly used.
- b. **"Warm iron"**—medium temperature setting.
- c. **"Cool iron"**—lowest temperature setting.
- d. **"Do not iron"**—item not to be smoothed or finished with an iron.
- e. **"Iron wrong side only"**—article turned inside out for ironing or pressing.
- f. **"No steam"** or **"Do not steam"**—steam in any form not to be used.
- g. **"Steam only"**—steaming without contact pressure.
- h. **"Steam press"** or **"Steam iron"**—use iron at steam setting.
- i. **"Iron damp"**—articles to be ironed should feel moist.
- j. **"Use press cloth"**—use a dry or a damp cloth between iron and fabric.

## 5. BLEACHING:\*\*

- a. **"Bleach when needed"**—all bleaches may be used when necessary.
- b. **"No bleach"** or **"Do not bleach"**—no bleaches may be used.
- c. **"Only non-chlorine bleach, when needed"**—only the bleach specified may be used when necessary. Chlorine bleach may not be used.

## 6. WASHING OR DRYCLEANING:

- a. **"Wash or dryclean, any normal method"**—can be machine washed in hot water, can be machine dried at a high setting, can be ironed at a hot setting, can be bleached with all commercially available bleaches and can be dry-cleaned with all commercially available solvents.

## 7. DRYCLEANING, ALL PROCEDURES:

- a. **"Dryclean"**—a process by which soil may be removed from products or specimens in a machine which uses any common organic solvent (for example, petroleum, perchlorethylene, fluorocarbon) located in any commercial establishment. The process may include moisture addition to solvent up to 75% relative humidity, hot tumble drying up to 160°F (71°C) and restoration by steam press or steam-air finishing.
- b. **"Professionally dryclean"**—use the drycleaning process but modified to ensure optimum results either by a drycleaning attendant or through the use of a drycleaning machine which permits such modifications or both. Such modifications or special warnings must be included in the care instruction.
- c. **"Petroleum," "Fluorocarbon,"** or **"Perchlorethylene"**—employ solvent(s) specified to dryclean the item.
- d. **"Short cycle"**—reduced or minimum cleaning time, depending upon solvent used.
- e. **"Minimum extraction"**—least possible extraction time.
- f. **"Reduced moisture"** or **"Low moisture"**—decreased relative humidity.
- g. **"No tumble"** or **"Do not tumble"**—do not tumble dry.
- h. **"Tumble warm"**—tumble dry up to 120°F (49°C).
- i. **"Tumble cool"**—tumble dry at room temperature.
- j. **"Cabinet dry warm"**—cabinet dry up to 120°F (49°C).
- k. **"Cabinet dry cool"**—cabinet dry at room temperature.
- l. **"Steam only"**—employ no contact pressure when steaming.
- m. **"No steam"** or **"Do not steam"**—do not use steam in pressing, finishing, steam cabinets or wands.

## 8. LEATHER AND SUEDE CLEANING:

- a. **"Leather clean"**—have cleaned only by a professional cleaner who uses special leather or suede care methods.

\*If ironing is not mentioned, it is not necessary.

\*\*If bleaching is not mentioned, all bleaches can be used when necessary.



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