

Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source

A. W. Koester

This publication is one of a set written to help consumers select and care for today's clothing. Three of the publications—fibers and fabrics; information found on garment labels; and dyeing and colorfastness—aid consumers in evaluating clothing and household textiles. Those on laundry aids and laundry detergents and soaps help consumers choose effective cleaning products. The publication on professional clothing care services discusses working with a dry cleaner.

Labels provide important information to help the consumer make decisions about purchasing textile products. It is the consumer's responsibility to look for, read, and use the label information. Some labels are required by law to appear on textile products. These include fiber content labels, which are intended to protect the consumer from mislabeled textile products in the store; care labels, which tell the consumer how to maintain textile wearing apparel; and flammability labels, which explain federal regulations for flame retardancy.

There are also voluntary labels, which may include textile manufacturers' logos, union names, warranties and certifications, and sizes.

Required labels

Fiber content labels. Fiber content labels are required by the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act (TFPIA) of 1960, amended in 1985. Their purpose is to protect the consumer from misleading advertising and mislabeling of fiber content on any textile products, whether made in the U.S.A. or imported from a foreign country. Fiber content labels must be attached to the product at the point of purchase but do not need to remain permanently attached.

The TFPIA requires that fiber content labels contain the following information:

- identification of the fiber(s) by generic name (the name of the family of fibers with similar chemical composition or origin);
- the percentage of each kind of fiber in the product;
- the manufacturer (by name or RN, registered number); and
- the country in which the item was processed and manufactured, whether it was produced in the U.S.A. or in a foreign country.

Identification and percentage of fiber.

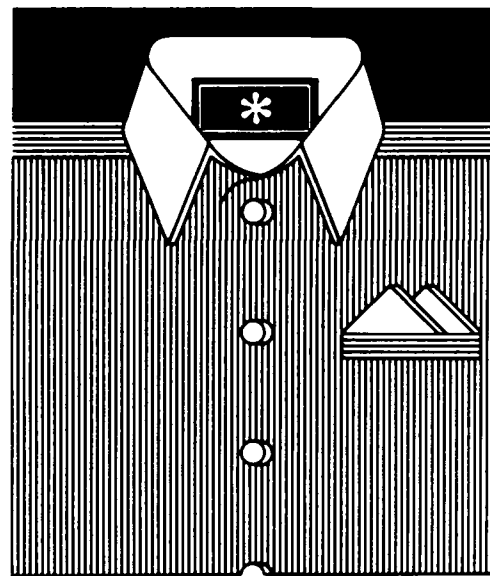
Knowing the generic fiber content allows the consumer to make choices based on expected comfort, durability, and ease of

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* TODAY'S CLOTHING CARE

care. Labels must state the percentage, in order of predominance by weight, of each fiber making up 5 percent or more of the total fabric weight. Usually at least 15 percent is needed for a fiber to make a performance difference in a blend; however, as little as 3 percent spandex will give elasticity to fabric. Fibers that comprise less than 5 percent of the total weight cannot be named but must be listed as "other" fibers, unless they have a clearly stated functional purpose. Sometimes small percentages of fibers like silk and cashmere are listed on the label to make clothing seem superior.

Labels on garments with sections, such as linings, must provide the fiber composition of each section. If a garment has two or more parts (skirt and jacket) or is marketed in pairs (pajamas) the fiber content may be listed on one label.

Piece goods are labeled on the end of the bolt or on a tag attached to the bolt. Manufacturers and importers of piece goods

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are required to list the fiber content or include a label stating the piece goods are remnants of undetermined fiber content. Retailers must display a conspicuous sign if piece goods are remnants of undetermined fiber content.

Fiber manufacturers may give trade names for advertising and product differentiation of the fibers they produce. Trade names are optional on labels, but generic names must accompany the trade name; both must be in the same size print and in English.

Manufacturer or registered number.

The manufacturer's name, a trade name or word trademark registered in the U.S. Patent Office, or a registered identification number (RN) of the manufacturer or distributor must appear on the label. The RN is issued by the Federal Trade Commission. Consumers can learn the name of the manufacturer represented by the RN number by phoning the Federal Trade Commission in Los Angeles, CA at (213) 209-7890.

Country of origin. In 1985 the TFPIA was amended to require that all textile, wool, and fur products carry labels naming the country of origin and identifying American-produced goods. The legislation came in response to the recent increase in textile imports from countries where labor costs are less than in the U.S. American producers believe American consumers would be willing to pay more if they knew the clothing and textile products were produced with American labor. The regulations include the following points:

Each imported product must be labeled with the name of the country where it was processed or manufactured, i.e. "Made in (foreign country)." Each product produced in

the United States from U.S.-made materials must be labeled "Made in U.S.A." Each product made partially in the U.S. and partially in a foreign country must be labeled to disclose the manufacturing process for each country, i.e. "Made in (foreign country), finished in U.S.A." Mail order catalogs advertising textile items must include the country of origin in the description of each item.

Wool product labels. The Wool Products Labeling Act (WPL) was passed in 1939 and amended in 1980. Its purpose is to protect consumers from the unrevealed presence of substitutes and mixtures in wool products. The WPL includes the following definitions of terms:

Wool means the fiber from the fleece of the sheep or lamb, or hair of the Angora or Cashmere goat (and may include the so-called specialty fibers from the hair of the camel, alpaca, llama, and vicuna) that has never been reclaimed from any woven or felted wool product. The specialty fibers may be identified by their own name.

Recycled wool includes fibers recovered from previously manufactured cloth. This can be both reprocessed wool that has not been used by consumers and re-used wool. The recycling process breaks the wool fibers into shorter lengths so the resulting fabric is weaker. Often manufacturers blend recycled wool with stronger manufactured fibers like nylon or acrylic to increase the durability. Recycled wool is sometimes found in lower-priced, heavyweight winter coats.

The WPL also requires the name of the manufacturer or an identification number. The identification number may be found on the label as a WPL number. Consumers may also phone the Federal Trade Commission in Los Angeles to learn the name of the manufacturer represented by the WPL number.

Fur product labels. The Fur Product Labeling Act of 1951 requires labels for protection from misbranding and false advertising of fur products. The labels should include the species of the animal; the country of origin; whether the paws, tails, or reused fur were included; if the fur was dyed, colored, or bleached; and the manufacturer, by name or registered number.

Permanent care labels. Permanent care labels are required by the Federal Trade Commission in a ruling passed in 1972 and revised in 1983, effective in 1984. The rule, which covers textile wearing apparel and certain textile piece goods, requires the manufacturer or importer to provide permanent instructions for regular care during ordinary use of the garment. The labels also must be visible or easily found at the point of purchase.

Included under the rule are items of textile fabrics used to cover or protect the body. Excluded are non-textile products such as leather, suede, fur, and several classes of merchandise. The exclusions include disposable items; household textiles such as upholstery, draperies, and carpets; remnants cut and shipped by the manufacturer; items for commercial use by institutional buyers; items costing under \$3; and special apparel such as sheer lingerie and reversible garments.

Under the 1984 revision, manufacturers of piece goods must provide care information only on the end of each bolt or roll or on the selvage of a fabric. The manufacturer or retailer does not have to provide the consumer with a label or tag listing care instructions. It is the consumer's responsibility to ask for the correct label or tag. Also, manufacturer's remnants up to 10 yards long do not require care labels if the fiber content is not known. If the retailer creates the remnant, he or she must provide care information to the consumer.

Manufacturers must have a reasonable basis, determined by testing, for the care instruction. If the method of care is important to the life of the garment, full instructions must be included on the label. The manufacturer needs to list only one method of safe care, no matter how many other safe methods there are. The manufacturer is not required to warn consumers about other methods that may not be safe.

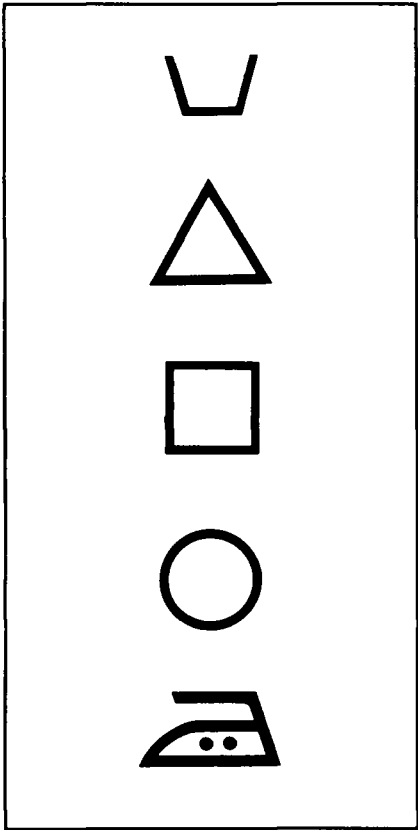
Labels give care instructions for machine washing, hand washing, or dry cleaning. They are based on a warning system; that is, if the consumer can use the harshest cleaning method, other methods are not specified. For example, if a label reads "Machine wash, tumble dry," the consumer can use water up to 150° F and the hottest setting on the dryer.

The same logic applies to bleaches. If the consumer can safely use all bleaches regularly on a machine washable garment, then the label does not have to mention bleaches. If no bleach is safe, then the label must state "No bleach." If nonchlorine bleaches are safe, then the label should say "Use only nonchlorine bleach, when needed."

"Dryclean" means the garment can be cleaned by any full, normal process of solvent cleaning, drying, and finishing. If not, the recommended solvent should be listed. If any regular dry cleaning procedures, such as steam pressing, are harmful, labels should warn against them.

If a garment will be harmed by all cleaning methods, the label must warn both the consumer and the drycleaner. The label should state specifically "Do not wash—do not dryclean." The consumer or drycleaner may be able to clean the garment only by vacuuming.

If the consumer follows the care instructions on the label and the garment shrinks, the color bleeds, or the fabric performs poorly, the manufacturer is responsible. The consumer has a right to



The basic international care symbols. The three-sided tub indicates washing; the triangle, bleaching; the square, drying; the circle, drycleaning; and the iron, pressing. See the Extension publication on international clothing care symbols for the complete set, including colors and variations.

return the garment to the retailer or to the manufacturer. If the problem is not resolved satisfactorily, consumers should notify the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Enforcement Division, Washington, D.C. 20580. The FTC cannot resolve problems between consumers and manufacturers, but they need to know the types of trade practices requiring action or revision in the rule.

International care labeling. As international trade increases, some foreign manufacturers use a system of symbols to bridge the language barrier. When clothing is imported to be sold in the United States it must have labels written in English, but symbols may also accompany the words. It is difficult to check all imports, and consumers who shop while traveling outside the U.S. may encounter some International Care Symbols. Each country may have its own guidelines.

The basic international care symbols are:

- a three sided tub, symbolizing washing;
- a triangle, symbolizing bleaching;
- a square, symbolizing drying;
- a circle, symbolizing drycleaning; and
- an iron.

There are variations of the symbols included in the full chart of symbols and temperature conditions. Color may be part of the system, with red meaning "do not carry out this procedure," amber meaning "use caution," and green meaning "no special precaution is needed." An "X" through a symbol means "do not use this procedure."

Flammability labels. Mattresses and mattress pads, carpets and rugs, and children's sleepwear in sizes 0—6X and 7—14 must have special labels and must meet the Consumer Product Safety Commission Code of Federal Regulations. Each children's sleepwear garment is required to have a Garment Production Unit (GPU) number and a Fabric Production Unit (FPU) number.

Manufacturers of children's sleepwear are required to test the fabric and components to meet the regulations. In addition, they must to keep records throughout the process of manufacture from fabric to the sale of the garment. The records include all test data, fiber content, and garment specifications; an untested garment from each style; and production records, quantities, and dates of sale and delivery. These records are held for 3 years.

Flame-resistant fabrics are not flameproof. Under certain conditions, they will still burn, but generally they ignite with difficulty, burn slowly, and self-extinguish when the source of heat and flame are removed.

Care labels must also warn against treatment that can cause deterioration of the flame-resistant finish. The labels provide special care instructions. Piece goods intended for children's sleepwear are labeled on the fabric bolt as "flame resistant—safe for children's sleepwear." Often cotton flannel-ettes and other flammable fabrics of similar weight and texture are labeled "not suitable for children's sleepwear."



PURE WOOL®

The sewn-in Woolmark label is your assurance of quality-tested fabrics made of the world's best...Pure Wool.



WOOL BLEND®

The sewn-in Woolblend Mark label is your assurance of quality-tested fabrics made predominantly of wool.

The Woolmark and Woolblend symbols. The Woolmark symbol appears only on products that are 100 percent wool. The Woolblend mark appears on products that contain a minimum of 60 percent wool. These labels are produced by the Wool Bureau and appear on fiber content labels or hang tags.

Voluntary labels

In addition to the required labels, some manufacturers voluntarily provide additional information to help consumers make satisfactory purchases. These labels also help promotion and product differentiation. Consumers should use all available information when making decisions related to the selection, use, and care of textile products.

Crafted With Pride. The Crafted With Pride in U.S.A. Council was formed in 1984 to promote and encourage the purchase of American manufactured textile products and instill pride in American workmanship. Their "Crafted With Pride in the U.S.A." logo appears on many hang tags.

Union labels. Union labels indicate the garment was sewn in the United States by members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, International Ladies Garment Workers Union of America, or the United Garment Workers of America. In general, union members have better pay and working conditions than non-union workers in the garment industry.

Woolmark and Woolblend symbols.

The Woolmark symbol appears only on products that are 100 percent wool. The Woolblend mark is for products that contain a minimum of 60 percent pure wool; the other 40 percent may be either natural or manufactured fibers. These labels are a promotional device sponsored by The Wool Bureau, an international trade association. These symbols appear on fiber content labels or hang tags.

Cotton logo and Cotton Natural Blend symbol. The cotton logo identifies and promotes 100 percent cotton products made in the United States of U.S.-grown upland cotton, a variety of cotton grown by the majority of American producers. The logo is a registered trademark of Cotton Incorporated, the research and marketing company that represents American cotton producers. The Natural Blend trademark indicates products that contain at least 60 percent U.S. upland cotton.

Dimensional stability labels and terms. Some, but not all, fabrics shrink or stretch out of shape during use and care. Generally, fabric blends that contain manufactured fibers will be less likely to shrink than 100 percent cotton, linen, ramie, or wool. Fabrics that contain 100 percent manufactured fibers tend to be heat sensitive and may shrink if subject to high temperatures in the dryer.

On labels, consumers will find terms to describe the ability of a textile to maintain its dimensions without stretching or shrinking during use and care. Two of the basic terms and their meanings are:

Preshrunk. The fabric has been prewashed; however, this does not tell you how much more the product will shrink during use and care.

Prewashed. The fabric is not likely to shrink when washed. It is sometimes used on denim to mean that it will fade less because of bleeding during the first wash.

Several companies have brand names for garments that have been treated and meet company standards for shrinkage. These registered trademarks include Sanforized, Sanforknit, Sanforset, and Rigmel.

Warranty and certification labels. A warranty means a product will be replaced if it performs unsatisfactorily. Each company writes the restrictions for its own warranty program, so the consumer must read the details of each one carefully.

A Monsanto Wear Dated Warranty means the fiber producer warrants the product with this label for a stated period of time, assuming that care label instructions are followed. For apparel, the Wear Dated warranty is 1 year; for upholstery fabrics it is 2 years; and for carpet fibers it is 5 years.

The Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval is given to certain products tested under conditions determined by the Good Housekeeping laboratory and advertised in their magazine.

Size labels. Clothing sizes in the U.S. are not standardized. Men's sizes are based on body measurements, but the amount of ease allowed varies with the designer and manufacturer. The size numbers in men's sizes refer to the body measurements. In women's sizes there are no standardized charts of women's body measurements or women's sizes based on those measurements. This lack of standardization causes frustration for consumers and a high rate of returns for mail order companies.

Currently, the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) is developing tables of standardized body dimensions on which sizes may be based for infants, children, men, and women. Many companies, especially mail order and pattern companies, have tables of body measurements they use in developing garments. Consumers should use these tables when they are available. The tables indicate the size of the body for which the garment was designed, not the actual

garment dimension. Style, fit, and fashion trends constantly change the relationship between the body and actual garment dimensions.

Brand labels. Brands are names, trademarks, or graphic logos created to identify products from a specific source, and to make the product different from that of the competition. The source of a brand may be a manufacturer, a designer, a store, or an importer.

Recently licensing of designers' names has become a popular form of brand labeling. In a licensing agreement, manufacturers are given permission to produce and market merchandise in the name of the licensor. The licensor is then paid a percentage of sales. Many well-known clothing designers license their names to a wide variety of products, ranging from perfumes to luggage.

Stores may use private brand labels. Although the store does not manufacture the item, they write the specifications the manufacturer will use including design, fabric, color, and sizes. The manufacturer may exclusively make private brands or may use the manufacturing of private brands to fill in between manufacturing seasons. Private brands are the store's way of giving the customer of a store an exclusive product, meeting price competition, and promoting the store.

Bar code. The apparel manufacturing industry has accepted the Universal Product Code standard, which is system of lines and numbers that can be read by an optical scanner. The purposes of the bar code are to increase accuracy, make recordkeeping quicker and easier, and get desired products to the consumer more quickly.

For more information

- Consumer Affairs Committee of the American Apparel Manufacturers' Association (1987). *The Labeling Book*. Arlington, VA.
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- Federal Trade Commission. (1985). *Rules and regulations under the Wool Products Labeling Act of 1939*, revised April 17, 1985. Washington, DC.
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- RN & WPL Encyclopedia*. (1988). New York: Salesmens' Guide Inc.
- Stone, J. (1985). *Look to the Label (Pm 733)*. Ames, Iowa: Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University.

Oregon State University Extension Service publications.

In July 1992 the OSU Extension Service publications warehouse was destroyed by fire. We are replacing our supplies. The publications listed below may be available in the office of the OSU Extension Service that serves your county. Check with that office for current prices.

You also may call Agricultural Communications at Oregon State University, (503) 737-2513, to learn the availability and current price of the publications.

- EC 1280, *Dyeing and Colorfastness in Fabrics*. \$1.00
- EC 1281, *Fibers and Fabrics Update*. 75¢
- EC 1282, *Professional Clothing Care Services*. 75¢
- EC 1283, *Laundry Detergents and Soaps*. \$1.00
- EC 1284, *Selecting and Using Laundry Aids*. 75¢
- PNW 284, *International Clothing Care Symbols*. 25¢



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