

Human Environmental Sciences Extension

Textile labels protect and inform consumers

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Many labels appear on clothes and household textiles. If you take the time to read them, they can help provide the facts you need to make informed buying and care decisions.

Some labels are required by federal law or trade regulations. Some are provided voluntarily by manufacturers. This publication reviews textile labels and what the information means to consumers.

Fiber content labels

Fiber content labels are required by the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act of 1960. This consumer protection law makes it illegal to misrepresent the fiber content on a textile product.

Manufacturers often give trade names to fibers they produce. Usually these names appear in advertising and on labels of textile items. The Textile Fiber Products Identification Act requires that the information on fiber content labels:

- ✓ Identify the fiber by generic name (the name of the family of fibers with similar chemical composition or origin).
- ✓ Give the percentage, by weight, of each kind of fiber in the product. *Exclusive of Ormentation* or a similar phrase, is used to designate fiber ornamentation contained in a textile product where that ornamentation represents less than 5 percent of the total fiber weight. *Ormentation* means any fibers or yarns imparting a visibly discernable pattern or design to a yarn or fabric.
- ✓ Tell who the manufacturer is — by name or registered number, shown as RN*.
- ✓ Tell where the item was processed and manufactured.

*The Federal Trade Commission has compiled a list of manufacturers and their RN numbers. For specific information call or write to them. See page 6.

Fiber content labels do not have to be permanently attached to garments or household textiles. They do not have to tell how the fabric is made (whether knitted, woven, tufted, bonded, etc.) or the fabric's weight. They do not have to tell about performance, finishes, dyes, shrinkage, or care recommended for the product.

Small amounts of an additional fiber can significantly change the characteristics of a garment. As little as 15 percent nylon will add strength to a blend and as little as 3 percent spandex will provide additional elasticity in a fabric. However, sometimes a fiber is listed on the label just to make the item seem superior or more elite. Silk and cashmere are often used in this way. Usually the textile must have at least 15 percent of the fiber in order to make a meaningful difference in the texture or performance.

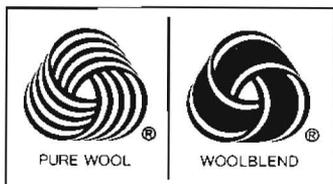
Wool labels

The Wool Products Labeling Act of 1939 requires that a label state whether the wool used in a textile item is new or virgin (never before used in cloth) or recycled (includes fibers recovered from previously manufactured new or used cloth).

- **Recycled wool** tends to be less strong than new wool because of its shorter fiber length. It is frequently blended with stronger synthetic fibers such as nylon or acrylic to make a more durable fabric. Recycled wool tends to shed more lint than new wool. Fabrics made from recycled wool may appear somewhat darker and duller in color. Recycled wool is sometimes used in lower-priced, heavy weight clothing, such as winter coats.
- **New or Virgin wool** is defined by the Wool Products Labeling Act of 1939 as wool that has never been used or reclaimed from any spun, woven, knitted, felted, manufactured or used product.

- **All-wool** is fabric of any description in which yarns are 100 percent wool from sheep. Other wools, such as angora, alpaca, camel, cashmere, mink and rabbit are named for the animal providing the fiber. They must be present in amounts of 25 percent or more to alter the properties of the blend.
- **Woolen** refers to a fabric that is thick and fuzzy. The wool fibers in the yarns are short and only partially straightened.
- **Worsted** is a wool fabric that is smooth, lustrous, and strong. The wool fibers in the yarn are long and have been straightened by combing.
- **Lambswool** means that the fiber came from a younger animal, up to seven months old. It is more likely to be soft and pleasant to touch.
- **Merino** is a very fine, soft wool from the Merino sheep.
- **Wool felt** is a non-woven fabric made by layering thin sheets of carded wool fibers, and treating them with heat, moisture and pressure to produce a tight, felted or matted fabric that does not fray or ravel. Felt is also made from acrylic and other fibers.
- **Bonded or Laminated wool** is wool-face fabric that is attached to a backing cloth to provide additional stability and body. The backing may be cotton, acetate knit, laminated foam, or another fiber.

Woolmark and Woolblend symbols



The Woolmark™ symbol can be used only on products made of 100 percent wool. The Woolblend Mark™ symbol can be used on products that contain a minimum of 60 percent pure wool and a balance of either natural or synthetic fibers.

These symbols are promotional. They are sponsored by The Wool Bureau, Inc., a trade association. Use by manufacturers is voluntary.

Seal of Cotton



The Seal of Cotton™ identifies 100 percent cotton products made in the United States from U.S.-grown upland cotton. Upland is the variety of cotton plant most commonly grown in the United States. The NATURAL BLEND™ trademark indicates durable press products containing at least 60 percent of U.S. upland cotton. The Seal of Cotton™ and NATURAL BLEND™ are registered trademarks of Cotton Incorporated, the research and marketing company representing American cot-

ton producers. They are used for promotion, like the Woolmark™ and Woolblend™ symbols, and participation by manufacturers is voluntary.

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Fur products labels

The Fur Products Labeling Act, 1951, requires labels to protect consumers from misbranding and false advertising of fur products.

Labels on fur products must state:

- ✓ The species of the animal.
- ✓ The country of origin.
- ✓ Whether paws, tails or reused fur were included.
- ✓ If the fur was dyed, colored or bleached.
- ✓ The name and/or registered number (RN) of the manufacturer.

Country of origin labels

"Made in the U.S.A." labels

Legislation enacted in 1984 modified the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act, the Tariff Act of 1930, and the Wool Products Act to require that all textile products be labeled to show "the name of the country where processed or manufactured." This means that any textile products entirely manufactured and made of materials manufactured in the United States, must be labeled "Made in the U.S.A.," or a similar designation.

If components of the garment were manufactured in another country, or if the garment was assembled in another country, the label must state this. If the fabric for a garment is from another country, or if the yarn for a sweater was produced in another country, this information must also be given.

Labels must be located on the neck of a garment or in another easy-to-find place. Small items, such as stockings, may be labeled on the package rather than on the actual item. This legislation came in response to increases in textile imports from other countries.

Crafted with Pride in the U.S.A.

To help American consumers identify textile and apparel products made in the United States, a major labeling and promotion campaign, "Crafted with Pride in the U.S.A.," was launched several years ago. This labeling is sponsored by the industry and is strictly voluntary on the part of the manufacturer. Only domestic products may carry this label.

American manufacturers use this label because many American consumers have expressed their willingness to make an effort to purchase clothing and textile products produced with American labor. Imported textile items sometimes cost less to consumers if lower labor costs are passed on to them.



However, U.S. textile and apparel industry association representatives point out that those imports compete with American-made goods and may result in closing of American production plants and subsequent loss of jobs to American workers. While this is a very complicated economic issue, the "Crafted with Pride in the U.S.A." promotion appears to be successful on an emotional level.

Care labels

The Permanent Care Labeling Rule of 1972, revised in 1984, states that all textile clothing sold in the United States must contain a permanent label giving complete information on regular care for the ordinary use and enjoyment of clothing items or fabric purchased to make clothing.

The label is intended to give the consumer and the dry cleaner guidance in proper care for the item. It must be permanently attached to the garment and remain legible for the life of the garment. The care label must also be placed where the consumer can read it before purchase OR the care instructions must be repeated on the packaging of the item.

Care instructions on the label must apply to all parts of the garment. This includes the outer shell, the lining, the buttons, interfacing, any fusing material, sewing thread, and all trim. All parts of the garment must be colorfast, they must not discolor, melt, or be otherwise altered during cleaning by the recommended care method.

The care labeling law applies only to apparel made from fabric. Therefore the regulation does not apply to a linen table cloth or a leather jacket. The law does not cover headwear (caps, hats, etc.); handwear (gloves, mittens); footwear (shoes, hosiery); remnants or "mill ends." It does not apply to items selling for \$3 or less.

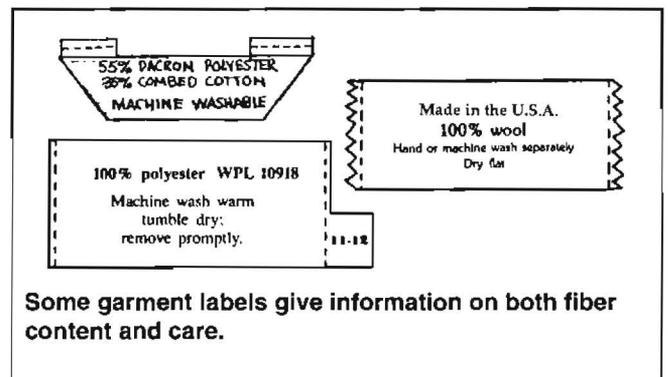
When a garment has two or more parts that are sold as a unit, only one label is required. When the parts are designed to be sold separately, or if pieces require different care, each part must have its own label.

The law requires that the label give full care information in English. When symbols as well as words appear on the care label, these are supplementary to the written instructions.

The care label law states that consumers and dry cleaners are responsible for following the instructions on the care label. If damage to a garment results from using care procedures not recommended on the care

label, the consumer or dry cleaner is responsible for that damage. If damage results in spite of following the care procedures recommended on the label, the manufacturer is responsible for the damage and the consumer should return the item to the retail store where it was purchased.

The manufacturer is required to list only one method of safe care for the garment, even if there are other safe methods that might also be used. Even if both dry cleaning and washing are acceptable, only one need be given. It is **not** safe to assume that an item that can be washed may also be dry cleaned safely. The manufacturer is not required to warn the consumer about care procedures that may not be safe.



The label must give restrictions about temperature and use of bleach. If the label states: "Wash or dry clean any normal method," the article 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. If water temperature and dryer settings are restricted, the label must state what temperature is safe.

If ironing is needed to preserve the appearance of a garment, instructions must be given. An iron setting (temperature) is only required if hot ironing is not recommended.

If any bleach is safe, then bleach need not be mentioned. If no bleach is safe, then the label must say: "No bleach." If only nonchlorine bleach is safe, then the label should say: "Use only nonchlorine bleach, when needed."

If dry cleaning is recommended, the type of dry cleaning solvent does not have to be specified unless some are not safe. If any regular dry cleaning procedures are harmful, such as steam pressing, the label should warn against these procedures.

The Permanent Care Labeling Rule, as amended in 1984, gives specific meanings for labeling terms:

- **Hot water** — water temperature up to 150° F (66° C).
- **Warm water** — water temperature 90° F to 110° F (32° C to 43° C).

- **Cold water** — tap temperature up to 85° F (20° C).
- **Durable or permanent press cycle** — cool down rinse or cold rinse before reduced spinning to prevent wrinkling.
- **With like colors** — wash with colors of similar hue and brightness.
- **Dry flat** — lay out horizontally for drying.
- **Block to dry** — reshape to original dimensions while drying.
- **Only nonchlorine bleach, when needed** — chlorine bleach may not be used.
- **Dry clean** — remove soil using organic solvents (petroleum, perchlorethylene, or fluorocarbon) with moisture up to 75 percent relative humidity, hot tumble drying (160° F or 71° C) and seam pressing or steam-air finishing.
- **Do not have commercially laundered** — special detergents, sour rinses, large loads, and high temperatures of institutional laundry may be harmful.

Items not covered by the Permanent Care Labeling Rule include:

- Disposable items
- Garments that need no care
- Household textiles
- Fur and leather goods
- Decorative or ornamental items
- Remnants cut and shipped by the manufacturer (mill ends)
- Items where a special exemption is obtained (e.g., sheer lingerie where the appearance would be impaired by the addition of a care label)
- Reversible garments
- Imported goods where harshest procedures are safe
- Items for commercial use to institutional buyers
- Items costing less than \$3.

The FTC care label rule requires that all trim on a garment be compatible with the care instructions given on the care label. The consumer must be aware, however, that a care label that states: "Dry clean only, exclusive of decorative trim" means that the dry cleaner must remove all the trim and then reattach it after dry cleaning. This might be a time-consuming and expensive procedure that would increase the cost of care beyond what most consumers would be willing to pay.

If a care label reads: "Do not wash, Do not dry clean" the garment may not be cleaned by any method. A garment labeled: "Dry clean except for trim," cannot be cleaned if the trim is not removable.

A label that says: "Professionally dry clean" implies that a coin-operated dry cleaning machine cannot be used because some modification to the standard dry cleaning procedure is required. Note, however, that this label is incomplete in that it does not say what those modifications are. A properly worded label might

read: "Professionally dry clean, reduced moisture, no steam." A dry cleanable garment that requires no modification should be labeled: "Dry clean."

It is the manufacturer's responsibility to provide a safe care method for every garment. If the care label instructions are impossible to follow, or if following them results in a ruined garment, it is the consumer's responsibility to report this.

The garment should be taken back to the retailer, who should contact the manufacturer. The Federal Trade Commission is collecting information about manufacturers who violate the care labeling law and may prosecute repeat offenders.

Sometimes the consumer will compare a garment labeled: "Dry clean only," with a similar garment labeled: "Machine washable," and wonder why it is necessary to dry clean one if not the other. There are two common reasons that may be the basis for these recommendations:

The first is the dye. Some garments are dyed with water-soluble dyes; others with solution-soluble dyes. If the wrong cleaning process is used, the dye may run and possibly ruin the garment.

The second is the fabric. Among the many new fabrics on the market today are a washable silk, a washable wool, and a washable rayon. However, not all silks, wools, and rayons are washable. In addition, some fabrics cannot tolerate the solvents used in dry cleaning. Failure to follow the recommended care procedure may result in a ruined garment.

Flammability labels

Children's sleepwear, mattress pads, carpets, and rugs sold in the United States are usually labeled: "Flame resistant." They are required by law to meet special flammability standards.

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 is removed.

Manufacturers must include special instructions for care necessary to preserve flame-resistant properties.

Labels for piece goods

Manufacturers and importers of piece goods fabrics (yard goods) are required to provide consumer information clearly and conspicuously on the end of each bolt or roll of fabric. Care instructions must follow the rules previously stated.

Manufacturers are no longer required to provide fabric retailers with care labels to give to consumers to sew into the clothes they make, although many have labels available and will provide them to consumers who ask for them.

Yard goods intended for children's sleepwear will also be labeled on the fabric bolt end with a statement such as "Flame resistant, safe for children's sleepwear." Often cotton flannelettes and other fabrics of similar weight and textures that are not treated for flame resistance will be labeled "Not suitable for children's sleepwear."

Labels about dimensional stability

Some fabrics shrink or stretch out of shape during use and care. A few terms may appear on the label to help inform consumers about the dimensional stability of a textile product.

- **Preshrunk** means some shrinking procedure has been followed, but does not indicate how much more the textile product will shrink during use and care.
- **3 Percent Shrinkage** means that the item may shrink as much as one inch per yard of fabric, resulting in the loss of almost one garment size.
- **Prewashed** is sometimes used on denim to indicate a softer fabric with some color fading. The garment is less likely to shrink when washed.
- **Sanforized™, Sanfor-Knit™, and Sanfor-Set™** are trademarks owned by Cluett, Peabody & Co.



Sanforized™ signifies that the woven cotton or cotton blend fabric has been tested and conforms

to a precise standard of effective shrinkage control. Sanfor-Knit™ signifies high standards of shrinkage control and easy-care performance in 100 percent cotton and cotton-blend knit fabrics and garments. Sanfor-Set™ signifies that the woven cotton or cotton-blend fabric conforms to precise standards of shrinkage control and easy-care performance.

Additional terms

There are several other terms that may appear on labels. While they are not required, they do have specific meanings.

- **Combed cotton** is a fabric that is smooth, lustrous, and strong because the fibers are long and straightened so that they lie parallel to each other.
- **Double needle stitching** means that the seams are closed with two parallel lines of stitching for extra strength.
- **Madras cotton** is a soft, plaid fabric made in India with yarns dyed with natural vegetable colors. These dyes usually fade or "bleed" in laundry, giving a blended color effect.
- **Permanent or durable press** fabrics have been given a special chemical treatment to make them more wrinkle resistant. They usually do not require ironing when properly laundered.
- **Pima** is an especially good quality natural cotton fiber that is longer, more lustrous, smooth, and usually more expensive.
- **Pure** is a term used to describe any fabric that is not a blend, e.g., "pure cotton" is another way of saying "100 percent cotton."
- **Ramie** is a cellulosic fiber grown in Asian countries. It is strong, lustrous, and smooth. It wrinkles easily and is flammable.
- **Raw silk** is a rather stiff, crisp textured fabric that has not been boiled (degummed) to remove the natural gum extruded by the silkworm.
- **Textured yarn** is a fiber yarn that has increased bulk, warmth and elasticity because it has been heat set with crimp.
- **Thread count** gives the number of yarns per inch in each direction in the fabric. A higher thread count gives a stronger, smoother fabric.

Resources

Fair Claims Guide for Consumer Textile Products

ANSI Number: ANSI/IFI 1-1988

American National Standards Institute, Inc.

1430 Broadway

New York, NY 10018

International Fabricare Institute

12251 Tech Road

Silver Spring, MD 20904

Care Labels, Caring for Your Clothes

International Fabricare Institute

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Silver Spring, MD 20904

Dickerson, Kitty

The Consumer's Choice, GH 965

University of Missouri-Columbia, Extension Division

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