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Clothing Labels

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Clothing from around the world is available in today's marketplace. Choosing just the right items to meet your needs can be fun, but it can also be confusing if you don't have all the facts.

Many labels appear on clothes, and if you take time to read them, they can help provide the facts you need to make a decision.

FIBER CONTENT LABELS

Fiber content labels are required by the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act, 1960. They serve to protect you from mislabeling of fiber content on textile products and from misleading advertising. The Act was amended in 1985.

The Textile Fiber Products Identification Act requires that 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 item in amounts of 5 percent or more; an exception is if fibers have a definite functional significance; example spandex for elasticity
- tell who the manufacturer is by name or registered number (RN)
- tell where the item was processed and manufactured and if it was imported or made in the United States.

These labels do not have to be permanently attached to garments or household textiles. They do not have to tell how the fabric is made, or about finishes, dyes, performance or shrinkage.

Check the percentage of the blend of fibers. Usually the textile must have at least 15 percent of the fiber to make a meaningful difference in the texture or performance. One exception is with spandex. As little as 3 percent spandex will provide additional elasticity in a fabric.

CARE LABELS

In 1971 the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued the Care Labeling Rule. This required manufacturers and importers to attach care instructions to garments and to fabrics by the yard. The Rule was revised and clarified on January 2, 1984. As a result, consumers benefit from clearer and more complete care instructions required by this revision.

Care labels must have the following information:

- The washing method (hand or machine), safe water temperature, the method and safe temperature for drying, and the temperature for ironing, if it is necessary.
- Common terms are to be used by the manufacturers.
- The manufacturer is required to list only one method of safe care for the garment, even if other safe methods may also be used. The manufacturer does not have to warn you about other care methods that may not be safe.

Some labels give both fiber content and care. It is important to read and follow the label.

Some general rules related to care labeling include:

1. If **no water temperature** or **dryer** setting is mentioned, it is safe to use any setting, even hot water and hot tumble drying.
2. If **no ironing** instructions are given, it should not be necessary to iron the garment. If ironing is needed to preserve the garment's appearance, instructions must be given. The label need not mention any ironing temperature if the regular use of a hot iron will not harm the garment.
3. If **bleach** is not mentioned, any type of bleach may be used, when needed. If bleach is unsafe, then the label must say "no bleach" or "do not bleach." If non-chlorine bleaches are safe, then the label should say "use only non-chlorine bleach when needed."
4. If **no warnings** are given, no adjustments are needed to the care process listed on the label.
5. If the label says **do not dry-clean**, don't assume you can. The type of dry-cleaning solvent does not have to be specified if all are safe. If not, the particular solvent to be used should be listed. A "Dry-clean" label means you can use a coin-operated machine. "Professionally dry-clean, short cycle, tumble warm" means you cannot since a coin-operated machine could not be adjusted to follow the process.

Rules specify that care labels must be visible at the point of purchase. If an item is packaged or folded in some way, the information must also appear on the outside of the package. Care labels must remain attached to the item and be legible throughout the useful life of the garment.

Read care labels carefully and be sure you understand the information given. Care labels are there to help you make purchase decisions and to avoid damage to your clothing from improper care. Make them work for you in getting more for your clothing dollar.

INTERNATIONAL CARE LABELING

As international trade increases, the United States and other countries are importing more garments. To assist the language barrier, a system of symbols has been established to indicate clothing care recommendations. Examples include:

Although these symbols may appear on clothing sold in the United States, the Care Label Rule requires that the care instructions be written in English for textile garments.

File NF93 under TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND DESIGN

B-6, Care

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