

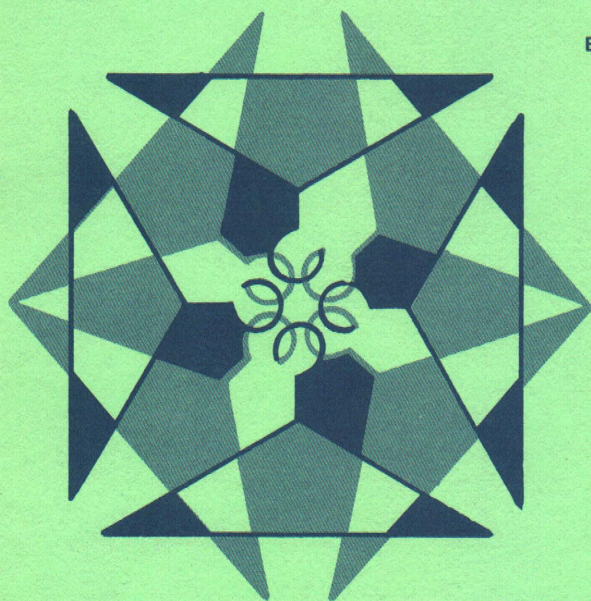
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Consumer Rights and Responsibilities with Clothing Fibers and Fabrics
Home and Family Series
Michigan State University
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Bernetta Kahabka, Extension Specialist, Clothing
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CONSUMER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

*with
Clothing Fibers and Fabrics*

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

By Bernetta Kahabka, Extension Specialist in Clothing

The variety and complexity of modern fabrics and clothing provide many advantages in serviceability to consumers. However, consumers at the same time are often frustrated and bewildered by these very advantages. Consumer rights are aimed at giving you some assistance. Your right to be informed about fabrics and clothing and protected against unsafe or hazardous products form the basis of our major laws.

1939 Wool Products Labeling Act

This law prevents adulteration of wool products with other fibers and the selling of other products as pure wool. All forms of wool must be strictly identified by kind or type and listed by percentage of content.

1. "New" wool or "wool" has never been used in a fabric before. "Virgin" wool is a high quality new wool and is often used to indicate "new" wool. (It does not have to be listed as such according to the law.)

2. "Reprocessed" wool has been used in a fabric, but not used by a consumer; the unused original fabric is reprocessed into fiber form to be re-manufactured.

3. "Re-used" wool has been used in a fabric by a consumer and then broken down into fiber stage to be used again in another fabric.

The wool symbol identifies 100% virgin wool products. This is a voluntary and promotional identification not required by law.

**Cue
For
Consumers**

Reprocessed and especially re-used wool fibers are less durable because the original fibers have been broken down and shortened. These fibers are still valuable for end uses such as warm coats, jacket interlinings and for their economy.

1960 Textile Fiber Products Identification Act

Under this law, products must be labeled with the kind and percentages of fiber content by weight in descending order. The law established a *generic* or "family name" system according to the chemical composition of fibers so that you would have fewer names to remember. The generic or family name(s) of the fiber(s) must be listed. Listing of fiber **trade** names is optional.

**Cue
For
Consumers**

All you need to do is become familiar with less than twenty generic names rather than 1,000 or more trade names.

Fiber content gives some clues to clothing serviceability IF you are familiar with the durability, comfort and care properties of the fibers. On the basis of this knowledge you must judge the finished product.

1951 Fur Products Labeling Act, Amended 1961

This act prohibits fur advertising which uses the name of any animal but the one from which the fur comes and the country of origin.

1953 Flammable Fabrics Act, Amended 1967

This law prohibits the sale of dangerously flammable apparel and household textile products. The term "dangerously flammable" is difficult to define and standardize. Research is required to establish when each fabric (cotton

flannel, for example) is "dangerously flammable" for each end use (children's nightgowns and pajamas, for example).

Only your concern and commitment to safety can reinforce the effectiveness of the act.

Your interaction with the government regulation programs is important—interaction is understanding the limits as well as the benefits.

**Cue
For
Consumers**

Once a law is passed, consumer benefits are not instantaneous. They depend on financial support, time and staff expertise to be carried out. Do you realize that once a law or regulation is passed, it must be supported by yearly funding and personnel for research, testing, regulating, surveillance, reporting and prosecuting procedures?

Consumer Responsibility

Will government laws and regulations cure all **your** problems with fabrics and clothing?

Can you translate information about fiber content into product serviceability in terms of durability, comfort and care? Specifically, how can you evaluate fabric shrinkage, wearing comfort, wrinkle resistance or color retention?

Today, fiber content on labels is the only information required by law which can help consumers make judgments. How much are you willing to pay through taxes or increased product cost to be informed and protected?

Do you realize how much your personal preferences influence the acceptance or rejection of fabric and clothing products, whether government regulated or not?

It is the responsibility of the government, business and industry to keep you informed and protected from unsafe or hazardous products.

Are your desires for product satisfaction always consistent with these rights? Sometimes the satisfaction of a clothing product has little to do with its serviceability. Satisfaction is more and more involved with fashion and esthetic appearance regardless of durability, care and comfort.

Serviceability and fashion blend in a product and should not be considered separately although they are given different degrees of importance in each clothing product. Furthermore, the degree of importance may change between the point of purchase and the point of care.

What dissatisfactions are likely to arise in the following situations?

1. The colorful design printed on a triacetate double knit may have to be handwashed because the agent which binds the colors to the fabric dissolves in drycleaning solvents. This means the colors will fade if the fabric is drycleaned. The consumer may prefer to machine wash or dryclean clothes, but

fashion and appearance (rather than care) took priority in this purchase.

2. Buying a fragile, delicate "fashionable" clothing product and then expecting sturdy durability.

3. Buying a shirt with washing instructions inconsistent with the way you want to machine wash a load of shirts.

Fashion and esthetic appearance are not factual, definite kinds of information that can be put on a label or hangtag, but their influence is strong at the point of purchase. Before you buy a clothing item, consider the limitations of your choices and what they will mean later in wear and care.

- Do you take advantage of the information given to you or do you disregard labels and hangtags?
- Do you carefully follow recommendations for care?
- Do you practice careless shopping habits in handling and trying on clothing for sale?
- Do you take the time and interest to make constructive criticisms of unserviceable merchandise?

These are **YOUR** responsibilities.

Make Constructive Complaints

It may be more important to make complaints to the manufacturer rather than to the store unless the store is part of a large retail outlet with its own quality control program. Merely replacing or refunding merchandise is not enough. If clothing products need improvement, the manufacturer should know. Saving sales slips, hangtags and labels may be a nuisance but it is part of the evidence if you should decide to make a complaint.

BE SPECIFIC ABOUT:

- The justification of your complaint.
- What the problem is.
- What improvements are needed.
- How you cared for it.
- Date of purchase, price, tags.
- Your name, address, phone number.

Consumership is planning for, buying, using and caring for fabrics and clothing with some awareness and understanding of the following:

1. The fiber-fabric-clothing industry and government regulatory influences on consumer choices and benefits.
2. The economic framework in which you, the industry, and the government operate.
3. The kinds of serviceability and satisfactions which can and cannot be measured or indicated on labels or hangtags.
4. The compromises between different serviceability factors combined in a single fabric and clothing product.
5. Why you cannot, and need not, be completely informed about all of the material, technical and economic factors which produce a final fabric or clothing product.
6. How much of your interest, time and energy you want to give or have to give in planning for, buying, using and caring for fabrics and clothing.

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