

A new leather standard

Research and testing organisation the Oeko-Tex Association has launched a leather standard for the first time. Already 18 organisations around the world are able to carry out formal testing of semi-finished and finished leather, as well as of leathergoods, to check they meet Oeko-Tex requirements.

Late last year, independent textile research and testing organisation the Oeko-Tex Association launched a leather standard for the first time. Now, 18 organisations around the world are able to carry out formal testing of semi-finished and finished leather, as well as of leathergoods, to check they meet Oeko-Tex requirements.

These requirements take into account legislation (including the demands of REACH in Europe and of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act in the US) on restricted and prohibited substances such as azo dyes, chromium VI, formaldehyde, pentachlorophenol, cadmium, perfluorooctanesulphonic acid, and so on. Oeko-Tex says its leather standard also covers “numerous hazardous chemicals” that are not (or not yet) subject to statutory regulations.

The intended use of leathers or leather products also constitutes an important criterion in testing. The greater the degree of skin contact a product is likely to have, the stricter the human-ecological requirements that these products have to comply with. The testing and certification system is of relevance for tanneries, leathergoods manufacturers, traders and sourcing offices and the Oeko-Tex leather standard is awarded only if all components of a product fulfil the specified criteria.

This means that a handbag, for example, constructed from responsibly made leather that meets Oeko-Tex’s criteria, can fail if a non-leather component such as a zip, a button or textile used in combination with the leather, fail to meet their own specific Oeko-Tex criteria.

The secretary general of Oeko-Tex, Georg Dieners, later confirmed shoes’ inclusion during a talk to present the new standard at a leather industry seminar organised by chemicals manufacturer Lanxess in Cologne in January.

Mr Dieners explained that detailed debate had taken place inside the Oeko-Tex organisation about this question because shoes are already covered by the Swiss body’s established Standard 100 certification. “We discussed this for a long time,” he said, “but shoes are in the scope of the leather standard.”

He explained that shoes with more than 50% leather content will be certified under the Oeko-Tex leather standard, whereas shoes with less than 50% leather content will continue to be certified under Standard 100. However, the leather components of those shoes will be tested according to the leather standard and he made it clear that a product could fail its Standard 100 certification if the leather component did not meet the requirements of the leather standard. “All parts of an article have to meet the criteria that apply to them,” Mr Dieners reiterated.

All the criteria for the Oeko-Tex leather standard are based on science, the secretary general emphasised, and because the body is independent, he argued that his organisation’s approach is more objective than others. “We are a third-party



If the leather in a handbag meets the requirements of Oeko-Tex standards, but a button or clasp does not, the product will fail.

CREDIT: ILM

non-governmental organisation,” he commented. “The only thing we want to look at is the science.” All accredited testing organisations will use the same method and test against the same criteria.

Accredited testing institutions are listed in a dedicated section of the Oeko-Tex website and there are details of the criteria for the leather standard there too. All of the institutions listed at the moment are European, and testing organisations in Spain, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, the UK and Portugal feature. “We don’t want institutions with no knowledge of leather to take this on,” Mr Dieners says. He says brands can use the standard as a marketing tool, as something that will demonstrate to consumers that the company they are buying from has a commitment to responsibility. ●