

Consumer Policy Institute

Consumers Union

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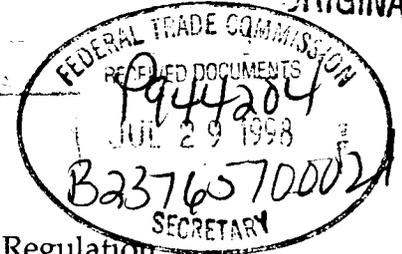
July 25 1998

ED:

Office of the Secretary
The Federal Trade Commission, Suite #4302
Sixth St. and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20580
Re: "16 CFR Part 423—Care Labeling Rule—Comment"

JUL 29 1998

ORIGINAL



Dear Secretary,

The following are Consumers Union's comments about the Trade Regulation Rule on Care Labeling of Textile Wearing Apparel and Certain Piece Goods (16 CFR Part 423) which you requested in the May 8, 1998 issue of the Federal Register.

1) The following comments refer to Item 1 *Labeling for Home Washing*:

- Consumers Union does agree that the Rule should be amended to require appropriate home washing instructions only for covered products for which home laundering and refurbishment is appropriate. However, Consumers Union does not support the addition of an optional dry cleaning label. The use of optional, dual dry clean labeling is: confusing to the consumer, costly to the manufacturer, requiring dual testing, and environmentally unsound due to potential increase in the use of PCEs which should be dissuaded.
- Manufacturers should substantiate a "dry clean only" label through pre-production garment testing including embellishments and notions or on the basis of fiber content, or garment construction.

2) The following comments refer to item 2: The "*Professionally Wet Clean*" Instruction:

- Consumers Union has not tested wet cleaning. However, extensive research, completed by PPERC and originally funded by EPA, supports the viability of wetcleaning. The Center for Neighborhood Technology in Chicago, also supported by EPA, has conducted numerous wet cleaning training sessions and prepared videos and materials for distribution. The growing use of wetcleaning by cleaners is demonstrated by national sales of wetcleaning equipment--approximately 4000 pieces of equipment, by the formation of a Professional Wetcleaning Network, and by the recent policy statement by the International Fabricare Institute that states, "The percentage of wetcleaning a plant can achieve is increased by the commitment of an individual to maximize their plant's wetcleaning capabilities. With a very high commitment, a plant may achieve higher than 80% wetcleaning."

- The FTC proposes that a manufacturer who knows that a garment can be cleaned either by professional dry cleaning or professional wet cleaning has two choices in a care label.

The choices are:

1) Dry Clean

OR

2) Professional Wet Clean, Precise fiber content, Super Clean machine, or Dry Clean.

- We oppose the requirement to include the name of a type of machine, since there is no requirement to include the name of any type of dry cleaning machine, and such detailed technical information is of no use to the average consumer. The precise fiber content should be listed, but not just on garments labeled for wet cleaning. Fiber content should be permanently affixed on all garments.
- The current FTC proposal puts an excessive and very likely prohibitive burden on any manufacturer considering a wet cleaning label. Despite the fact that FTC is proposing not to require testing, a manufacturer or importer wishing to label a garment professional wet clean will have to test the cleaning method in a particular machine or be guilty of false advertising by indicating a specific type of equipment without doing testing. If a manufacturer decides to label with a particular machine type, the question of the availability of that machine type in the consumer's vicinity becomes an issue. The label, designed for the consumer and a garment care professional could cause additional problems when consumers are forced to look for a professional who has a particular type of equipment. All of this we believe is inappropriate and unnecessary.
- Consumers Union supports a requirement for testing of garment care methods as the only reasonable basis for such a claim on a label. Such a requirement should be universal, for all garments and care methods and not just for those labeled professional wet clean. See our comments on the reasonable basis standard. We do not support more onerous and anti-competitive requirements for a garment care method that has fewer environmental impacts than cleaning with a toxic chemical. As we indicated earlier, we support precise fiber identification affixed to a permanent label for all garment care methods.
- Manufacturers should have the option of choosing to label professional wetcleaning or dry cleaning. Consumers Union supports a professional wetcleaning label for consumer awareness of more environmentally sound cleaning methods. However, we do not support this label in the form proposed by the FTC because we feel it will serve as an overall disincentive to the widespread adoption and use of this cleaning method.

As a consequence we believe this rule as currently structured, requires an environmental impact statement for its potential negative impacts on the increasing use of this more environmentally sound option for professional garment care.

- Finally, Consumers Union supports the definition of Wetcleaning proposed by the Center for Neighborhood Technology.

Wetcleaning is the cleaning of clothes in a commercial setting with a water-based system that utilizes specially formulated detergents, and precise control (either manual or computerized) over the mechanical action, water temperature and level, and carefully regulated drying. Wetcleaning spotting is done by using products designed for the process that can be safely discharged to sewer systems. Pressing of wetcleaned garments may be done either with conventional professional pressing equipment, or with tensioning finishing equipment and/or drying cabinets for greater productivity.

- 3) "Reasonable basis" should be clarified to indicate whole garment or prototype garment testing inclusive of trim, embellishments and notions. Prototype garments must be made of production fabric(s). Component testing alone is not enough. Test methods should reflect reasonable consumer and professional cleaning practices and should follow ASTM appropriate garment performance specifications. These methods should gauge product performance after three to five care cycles and assess shrinkage, colorfastness, and appearance retention.

- A record keeping requirement should be a matter of standard manufacturing practice. Consumers Union recommends the inclusion of a record keeping requirement.
- The Rule should include a provision to allow consumer recourse when a product does not perform when stated care instructions are followed. Failure to perform would include one or more of the following: 2 point color change on the AATCC gray scale, 5% shrinkage, and staining from trim, embellishments and/or notions.
- Consumers Union recommends that fiber content should be part of the permanent care label. This would aid professional cleaners and non-professionals in making appropriate laundering and refurbishment choices.

- 4) The following comments refer to Item 4: *Definitions of Water Temperature:*

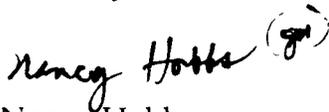
- Consumers Union does agree that water temperature as defined in the Rule be consistent with the definitions specified in AATCC test methods.
- Cold water temperatures may be much cooler than the AATCC recommended $80^{\circ} \pm 5^{\circ}$ F. Most consumers are unaware that detergent becomes increasingly ineffective at as temperatures drop below 60° F.

Therefore, Consumers Union advises that cold water should be defined as 60° to 80° F and recommends consumer education on minimum wash water temperatures.

- Hot water temperature should be defined as 120° to 140° F to realistically represent temperatures produced by domestic hot water heaters and scald laws in some states.
- 5) In addition to the proposed amendments to the Rule, Consumers Union recommends stating dryer temperatures as opposed to stating "high", "medium", and "low". There are no standard definitions within the dryer industry for maximum temperatures at each setting. Consumers Union recommends standardizing maximum temperatures for high, medium and low dryer settings. Currently, AATCC Test Method 135 states the maximum dryer exhaust temperature for high as 150° ± 5° F and low as below 140° F.

It should be noted that dryer temperature ranges for each setting overlap depending on drier make and model. This can adversely effect wrinkling, shrinkage, and appearance particularly of synthetic fabrics. Dryer temperatures that exceed the glass transition temperature of synthetic fibers will cause permanent creases. Additionally certain synthetic fibers will shrink when exposed to high temperatures.

Sincerely,



Nancy Hobbs
Project Leader
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Barbara Warren
Project Director
NY Toxic Air Project

Cutting clothing-care costs

MUST YOU OBEY THAT LABEL?

Because of the high cost of dry-cleaning, it's no surprise that many CONSUMER REPORTS readers we surveyed avoid buying clothes with dry-clean-only labels. Some of them admit to gambling—washing clothes when the label says dry-clean only. There are also health reasons why washing may be the better choice, if the garment can take it (see box).

Manufacturers often recommend dry-cleaning on labels to avoid assuming responsibility for laundry-room disasters. Other methods may be equally safe—even preferred. The Cashmere and Camel Hair Manufacturers Institute, for example, says that cashmere sweaters come out best when machine-washed.

To see what happens when dry-clean instructions are ignored, our textile experts hand-laundered more than two dozen women's blouses labeled dry-clean only. And we talked with textile and clothing experts, authorities in the dry-cleaning industry, and trade groups for advice on money-saving clothing care.

Breaking the rules

You may have had some success with washing certain fabrics: silk shirts or rayon blouses, say. But not all silks or rayons behave the same way in water. Intensely colored silks, for example, can "bleed." Finishes used on rayon can be washed away. Weave, which gives fabrics texture and, sometimes, pattern (such as a stripe or a plaid), makes a difference.

We bought the blouses in pairs—one to be dry-cleaned, one to be hand-washed. We included rayons, rayon blends, and silks. Weaves in-

cluded crepes, crinkled fabrics, tightly woven plain weaves, and more.

Overall, silks fared better than rayons. When washed, the plain-weave silks hardly shrank at all. Even in a crepe weave, silk shrank less than rayon—about 3 per cent—in washing.

A plain-weave rayon had minimal shrinkage, but rayons and rayon-blends in pebbly crepe or crinkle weaves often shrank dramatically.

Even dry-cleaning wasn't always

safe. Some rayon crinkles and crepes stretched when dry-cleaned. The silks dry-cleaned well.

When must you dry-clean only and when can you take a risk and launder a garment? Here are some guidelines, based on our tests and on our talks with experts:

Rayon. Rayon loses strength when wet, so it can shrink or stretch. Both washing and dry-cleaning can remove the sizing that makes rayon garments look crisp. If you do decide to take a risk and wash rayon, do it by hand in cool water. Squeeze out excess water; lay heavy garments flat to dry.

Silk. Fancy weaves and intensely colored prints must be dry-cleaned. Simple solid-color clothes can be washed by hand in cool water.

Sweaters. Many can be washed in cold water, by hand, and dried flat. After drying, fluff mohair sweaters with a brief tumble in the dryer on no-heat. Angora must be dry-cleaned. Cashmere can go in the washer inside-out; it's best dried flat. Most cotton sweaters can be machine washed and dried. Fancy, loose knits

Air before you wear *The perc hazard*

Perchloroethylene (perc), the solvent commonly used in dry-cleaning, is classified as a hazardous air pollutant by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It has been associated with nervous-system and kidney disorders, as well as with cancer among industry workers.

Residents of apartment buildings that house a dry-cleaner are likely to be exposed to unacceptably high levels of perc, according to a 1995 CU test (to receive a copy, send \$5 to Consumers Union, Box GW, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, N.Y. 10703).

There are also dangers to people who often wear freshly dry-cleaned clothes. In a test we reported on last March, we documented exposure levels by taking 20 identical blazers to dry-cleaners in New York City. Some had old equipment, some new; and some sent garments out to a central plant. Staff volunteers wore the cleaned jackets, along with a monitor that measured perc emissions.

The emissions varied widely, but some were quite high. People who often wear freshly dry-cleaned clothes could inhale enough perc to incur a slightly increased risk of cancer.

There are a number of steps you can take to minimize your exposure to perc. First, try to buy washable clothing (even some woolens are now washable). With dry-clean-only clothing, as the accompanying report notes, stretch the time between dry-cleanings—or consider hand-washing the item despite the label.

When items must be dry-cleaned, try to find a "professional wet cleaner." Wet cleaning, which uses detergents and water, is still rare in this country and may not be appropriate for all clothes. But it works fine on many, according to reports from Germany, where it is widely available, and some preliminary studies in the U.S., where there are about 100 outlets. Industry experts say that the dry-cleaner of the future will offer both conventional and wet-process cleaning.

When you do use a conventional dry-cleaner, remove clothes from the plastic bag as soon as you get home and air them in a well-ventilated area (like the garage) for a few days before wearing. If they have a strong chemical smell, take them back and insist the dry-cleaner do a better job.