

TEXTILE FIBER PRODUCTS IDENTIFICATION ACT

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It is a pleasure to be able to explain to you a recent contribution of the Federal Government to the protection of consumers and of industry. Since 1937, four Federal laws dealing with textile products have been enacted and eight Federal Trade Practice Rules have been adopted. A Guide Against Deceptive Pricing, which will apply to textile products as well as to many other items, has also been adopted. All these provisions aim to protect consumers from false or misleading advertising or from the lack of adequate information, and to protect industry and business from unfair competition.

The promulgation of these protective measures has occurred in a relatively short period -- a span of 22 years of increasing confusion for buyers of textiles. At the beginning of this period, consumers were baffled by silks which quickly deteriorated, belying the tradition of lasting beauty for such fabrics. Later, the man-made cellulosic fibers began to compete with the time-honored textile fibers. Because of differences in appropriate use and care, consumers needed to be able to distinguish between the well known fibers and the newer rayons and acetates. Clarification also became necessary as to what should logically and honestly be labeled wool, linen or fur. Consumers found themselves subject to the purchase of highly flammable fabrics. Last, but not least, although the public reaped the benefits of having available many fabrics made from the chemically-produced fibers, bewilderment spread when the number of such fibers multiplied rapidly and the difficulty of identifying them, and therefore of caring for them properly, increased. The trend towards using the chemically-produced fibers in blends or in combination with the natural fibers likewise presented problems to those who wanted to know what to expect from the blends and how to care for them. The need for protection was obvious as each of these complex situations arose.

The scope and timing of the labeling acts and trade practice rules reflect the Federal Government's responses to complaints regarding confusion and serious problems from consumers of textile products as well as from manufacturers or retailers of them. An early Federal regulation provided controls for the labeling of rayon, while a later ruling differentiated between rayon and acetate fabrics. Provisions were made for the labeling of silk, linen, wool, and fur; for statements of shrinkage control of woven cotton yard goods; and for advertising of hosiery, of house dresses and wash frocks, and for trade practices in the popular priced dress industry. Through the "Flammable Fabrics Act", the public was protected against certain flammable fabrics which ignite easily

and burn with great repidity. The latest protective measures taken by branches of the Federal Government include the "Textile Fiber Products Identification Act" and the "Guides against Deceptive Pricing".

At the time the need for fiber identification was recognized, three bills were introduced; H R 469, introduced by Representative Frank E. Smith; H R 5605, by Representative Peter F. Mack Jr.; and S 1616 by Senator Lister Hill.

Opposition to the passage of any such fiber identification laws was extensive and strong. Arguments against compulsory fiber identification included the lack of need for this kind of legislation; the impracticality or impossibility of enforcing the measure; increased cost and labor to manufacturers and retailers; and, the fact that fiber identification alone would not help consumers who want to know what to expect in service from fabrics and how to care for them.

Arguments in favor of the legislation recognized the fact that fiber identification, although not all that consumers would desire, would help at least in connecting fiber name with performance in use, and therefore was a step forward; that fiber identification was practical as had been proven by previous legislation; and fiber identification would help in selecting proper care precedures.

In spite of opposition, the "Textile Fiber Products Identification Act" became law on September 2, 1958. This Act was the bill H R 469 as finally amended, and the law is now Public Law 897. Hearings for the rules and regulations for the functioning of this act were started on March 10, 1959. The rules and regulations are to be promulgated on or before June 3, 1959 and the law will become effective on March 3, 1960.

The purpose of the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act is "To protect producers and consumers against misbranding and false advertising of the fiber content of textile fiber products ...". "... a textile fiber product shall be misbranded if it is falsely or deceptively stamped, tagged, labeled, invoiced, advertised, or otherwise identified as to the name or amount of constituent fibers contained therein". One should study a copy of the Act in order to fully comprehend the provisions included.¹ A brief explanation of some of the provisions follows: A legible "stamp, tag, label or other means of identification" must be affixed to a textile fiber product giving: (a) the generic name of the constituent fiber or combination of fibers listed in order

¹Copies of the Act may be obtained without charge from your Congressmen or from The Federal Trade Commission, Washington 25, D. C.

of predominance by weight and including percentage of each fiber present, providing weight of any such fiber or fibers is 5 percent or more of the total fiber weight. (b) fibers (exclusive of permissible ornamentation) totaling to 5 percent or less by weight of the total fiber content, shall be designated as "other fiber" or "other fibers". (c) the name or other identification of the manufacturer of the product or of specified other. (d) the country where the textile fiber product was manufactured, if the product is imported. Written advertisement must include the names of fibers in the product as on labels, except that percentages need not be given. The act covers textile fiber products not covered by the Wool Products Labeling Act, including carpets, rugs and mats. The Act covers most textile fiber products but excludes some items such as upholstery stuffing; linings, interlinings, filling or padding used primarily for construction purposes, stiffenings, trimmings, facings or interfacings, backings of floor coverings; sewing thread and others.

The Federal Trade Commission formulated and published the Proposed Rules and Regulation for the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act. Hearings are being held as this explanation is being prepared. Therefore, the final rules and regulations cannot be included. The proposed rules and regulations were 45 in number and included definitions necessary for the interpretation and enforcement of the Act. A very important accomplishment of the Federal Trade Commission is the establishment of generic names for the classes of man-made fibers. These generic names can be used as classifications for most of the man-made textile fibers presently on the market. Provisions were included in the rules and regulations for examination of petitions to establish generic names for new fibers.

In addition to the generic names for textile fiber products, the rules contain definitions which will contribute to clearly understood advertising. For example, the definition of elastic material. It is defined in terms of the elastomer used, the percent stretch at 70^oF., and the return after the stress is removed. Likewise, the correct use is described of "all" or "100".

Regulations stipulated that the information on tags or labels shall be in English and that the label shall carry the following: generic names and percentages by weight of constituent fiber(s), under the conditions previously described; names or registered identification number issued by the Commission to the manufacturer or one or more persons handling the textile fiber product; the name of the country where the product was processed or manufactured, if the product is an imported article; all information to be conspicuously and separately marked on the front side of the label "in immediate conjunction with each other and in plainly legible and conspicuous type or lettering of equal size and prominence"; the required name of manufacturer or registered number can be on the reverse side of the label if it is conspicuous and accessible.

Other provisions include directions for products containing linings, interlinings, fillings, and paddings; textile fiber products containing superimposed or added fibers; pile fabrics and products composed of them; products contained in packages; labeling of pairs or products containing two or more units; use of invoice when product is not in the form intended for sale, delivery to or use of the ultimate consumer; products using reused stuffing; guarantees; maintenance of records; use of trademarks in advertising; fiber content tolerances; and products not intended for uses subject to the Act.

The Act was inspired by the need of consumers, manufacturers and retailers and was passed by legislators who recognized these needs. The Federal Trade Commission had a complicated area for which to write rules and regulations. Manufacturers, and retailers will have problems in complying with the Act. Consumers now have a grave responsibility to be so well informed about the Act that they can benefit to the utmost from the law.

Consumers can count on additional information given by the manufacturers of textile fiber products as being very helpful in anticipating the in-use characteristics of the products. For example, trade names of fibers with which consumers are familiar or with which they will become familiar in the future, will become associated with specific use characteristics. Thus the consumer will be able to build a fund of information dealing with general class characteristics of textile fiber products and also with the specific characteristics of specific products in a class.

Consumers also should realize that the establishment of the generic names at this time will be a simplifying factor eventually although at the moment it may seem to be a complication for consumers. They, therefore, should make every effort to become thoroughly familiar with the generic names. Of the 16 generic names, at least 6 and perhaps more are probably familiar to almost everyone. In order to aid in memorizing the unfamiliar generic names, it will be wise to list typical trademarked product or products which belong in each category.

In addition to the protection of the Act and to the help which constructive advertising by the manufacturers can give, consumers will be protected from purchasing sub-standard textile fiber products as soon as many manufacturers publicly accept the voluntary standards of the American Standards Association. Those who have announced the decision to comply with L22, according to reports, are very pleased with the acceptance of the fabrics so made. Retailers also described consumer use as favorable for fabrics labeled as meeting L22 standards. It is to be hoped that consumers are aware of the advantages of purchasing such materials.

In closing, consumers should be grateful for the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act. They should assume the obligation of adding to the information provided in the Act so that they may become better informed purchasers.

Since the rules and regulations will not be in their final form until early June, each person interested in consumer education will need to have a final copy in order to be able to interpret the Act to others.