

IFAI Expo: Implementing greener chemistry in supply chains

By: Glenna Musante

The global textile industry is moving steadily toward a future dependent on greener chemistries than many of the ones currently in use. There are several factors driving this trend, including increasing consumer demand for greener products, but the process involved with converting to more sustainable chemistries and processes is both complex and risky.

According to Ben Mead, Managing Director of Hohenstein Institute America, pressure from organizations inside the global textile industry, as well as current and pending legislation, are also factors making it necessary for companies to closely review and reconsider the chemistries and processes they use to make textiles. Both here in the US and overseas legislation is in place, or pending, that would ban chemicals that are potentially hazardous or trigger allergic reactions.

Mead spoke as part of the Advanced Textiles Conference at IFAI Expo in Nashville.

Chemistries used to manufacture clothing, and which have direct contact with skin, are of special concern, as are those that can significantly pollute air, water and land resources globally.

Replacing hazardous chemicals such as formaldehyde or fluorine is important but there are several risks involved for manufacturers. This includes concerns related to potentially losing proprietary information related to the ingredients and chemistries used to make their products. Establishing a relationship with an organization that can help a company make the transition to greener future requires working with people who can be trusted with a company's intellectual property, plus have a comprehensive understanding of the sustainability landscape.

Mead added that this landscape is populated by a variety of standards that are not all the same. Adopting a consistent set of standards related to the replacement of hazardous chemistries is an important goal for the industry, but not currently available.

Meanwhile, assistance identifying a chemistry's hazard profile and finding greener alternatives that are efficient and effective is a continuing challenge for textile companies. Programs such as Hohenstein's Oeko-Tex Standard have been designed to help manufacturers comply with varying regulations, and pressures, as they make the transition to more sustainable manufacturing processes.

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