

BSCI GUIDANCE ON SANDBLASTING

March 2011

ABOUT SANDBLASTING

In order to answer to consumer demand for jeans with a faded look, the technique of sandblasting has been applied widely in the textile supply chain. Recently, a lot of attention has been paid to the potential dangers of sandblasting. In the process of sandblasting, jeans are sprayed with sand to create a used and old look in specific areas of the garment. Sand contains the mineral silica, which can cause silicosis in the lungs if workers inhale the dust. Silicosis is an incurable lung disease caused by inhalation of dust containing free crystalline silica.

In many European countries, the use of abrasive material containing crystalline silica is already prohibited (in most cases, a maximum of 1% silica is set). As of April 2009, a legal ban on sandblasting is in place in Turkey, following an announcement that 40 workers died from silicosis. In many other textile sourcing countries, sandblasting is unregulated.

THE BSCI'S APPROACH

The BSCI Code of Conduct requires that in countries where sandblasting is permitted, such as China, India and Bangladesh, preventive measures are in place in the factories to reduce the health risks for workers. During a BSCI audit, the auditor will carefully check that preventive measures are respected and that employees are informed about risks. This includes verifying that:

- A management system is in place to ensure and regularly check employees' safety.
- Clear instructions and training are given to employees on handling machinery and hazardous materials.
- Only authorised and qualified staff are allowed to handle hazardous materials
- The good condition of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is ensured and the use thereof is enforced.
- Signs and warnings are posted in corresponding areas and on machinery reminding employees to wear PPE.

Beyond auditing, the BSCI invests many efforts in building the capacities of suppliers to comply with the Code of Conduct requirements. Issue-specific advanced workshops focus in on the major social compliance challenges in a particular country or region and give suppliers practical knowledge on how to improve the conditions in their factories. Furthermore, the BSCI engages in and supports the development of Round Tables, regular gatherings of key stakeholders in a particular country. These Round Tables serve to identify causes and search for joint solutions to national CSR/social compliance challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBERS

The use of adequate PPE while performing sandblasting can protect workers from harm resulting from exposure to silica. However, sandblasting is often subcontracted and that makes it difficult for brands to be sure that adequate safeguards are in place. In light of this, a number of companies have taken the step to ban sandblasting in their supply chain, among which also several BSCI members.

The BSCI advises members to:

- Map out where in their supply chain sandblasting is practiced and ensure this happens in a safe manner, paying specific attention to sub-contractors and sub-suppliers.

- Beyond this, consider banning the practice of sandblasting in their supply chain (and, should this decision be taken, to prepare a communication and implementation plan, including e.g. clear instructions to buyers and suppliers, as well as external communication with clear timelines for e.g. last orders of sandblasted jeans, last date on which sandblasted jeans would be brought into the market, etc).
- Ensure that any alternative production method has no negative effects on worker health and safety.

NEXT STEPS

The BSCI will:

- Inform its members about the risks associated with sandblasting and encourage them to ban the practice in their supply chain
- Distribute information on sandblasting to BSCI-accredited auditing companies and auditors, to ensure adequate attention is paid during audits and that in the future audit reports contain information on the use of the sandblasting technique at suppliers.

Contact: Carien Duisterwinkel, Stakeholder Relations Project Manager