

Detox: from threat for brands to opportunity for labs and manufacturers

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Several chemical substances have always been used to make clothes, which through water discharges and household care can be harmful for the environment and toxic for human health. To protect fresh and sea water resources, in 2011 Greenpeace launched the Detox campaign, aimed at having cleaner and toxic-substances-free fashion.

Companies are called by Greenpeace to eliminate within 2020 harmful chemicals, which are 11 groups of substances selected to be eliminated as a priority. They include compounds used in the textile sector and to which several restrictions apply, which have been issued by the main international conventions and regulations. Main elimination tool is the company's M-RSL (Manufacturing Restricted Substances List) that the Detox committed companies disclose to the public and ask their suppliers to comply with. The list of substances to be eliminated has grown to around 430 compounds now. The elimination principle assumes that no limit of use can be manageable, for at least four reasons: 1) most of these substances are bio-accumulative, so even the most restricted use can result in a significant pressure on the ecosystem due to repetition by many wet-processors and over time; 2) diversified regulations and control systems at the global level; 3) risk of misuse by actors in good faith and of bad use by careless ones; 4) the offer of alternatives for mainstream chemicals substitution generally need expensive investments on research from chemicals producers, that on their turn need risk and opportunities pressures to be triggered. For these reasons, the Detox M-RSLs LODs are set to the best current testing technology using lowest detection / reporting limits always updated and applied.

The aim being not just reduction but total elimination of potentially harmful chemicals, Detox has proved to act as a flywheel for innovation towards green chemistry by chemical producers, which have started to offer new products free from specific substances banned from Detox and similar initiatives like ZDHC, Bluesign® etc., based on less strict admissible limits. This has triggered the implementation of ZDHC, Bluesign®, etc. compliant green lists (proxies of Detox green lists) by chemical producers and Testing,

Inspection and Certification (TIC) providers (BV, SGS, TÜV). In a way, Detox, through its "watchdog" Greenpeace, works like a "leader" that traces the path and pulls its "followers" to raise the bar in the path towards total elimination of the harmful substances. In around 5 years, the Detox "umbrella" has covered, according to Greenpeace, about 15% of the total fashion turnover realized in the world by the 28 global brands and retailers and 51 manufacturers committed. 31 of those belong to a single cluster program in Prato, Tuscany.

In the Prato textile district in Tuscany, the local business association Confindustria Toscana Nord (CTN) has created a consortium to gather and support a group of 31 committed companies since early 2016 and launched CID, a Consortium for Detox Implementation, in October 2016. Tests made in the Detox framework are public, the environmental performances of the supply chain can be known by any stakeholder, in accordance with the public right-to-know principle.

Detox test packages are now offered by numerous labs having invested on cutting edge machinery (e.g. Intertek, BV, Buzzi, Centrocot, Brachi..). Since 'zero' in chemistry does not exist, detection limits are set to the best current testing technology using lowest detection / reporting limits always updated and applied.