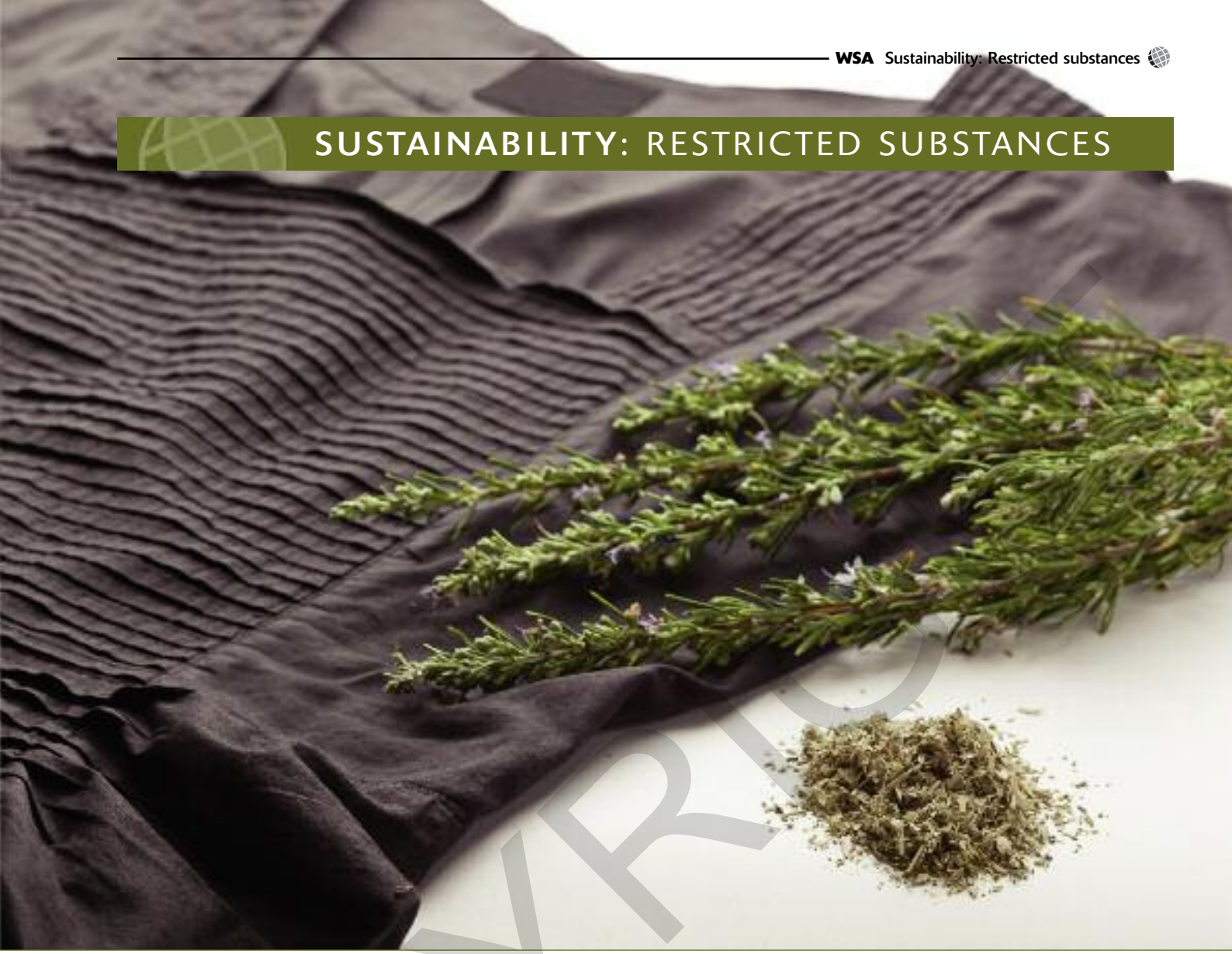
SUSTAINABILITY: RESTRICTED SUBSTANCES



The founder of Swiss certification group certification group Bluesign, Peter Waeber, has said that, although everyone in the textile and apparel industry would like to have greener chemistry, no one wants to pay for it. Improvements in the way companies across the supply chain manage restricted substances are no solution to this fundamental problem, he fears.

Green chemistry blues

There is much excitement about manufacturing restricted substance lists (MRSLs) in the textile and garment supply chain, with advocates claiming confidently that this development represents significant progress from companies imposing their own restricted substance lists (RSLs) on manufacturers. A better response to the calls for a more sustainable industry in general and to initiatives such as the Greenpeace Detox Campaign and the Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC) in particular can come, proponents insist, from suppliers at different stages of the supply chain taking a share of the burden and providing information about products and raw materials with transparency and trust.

The founder and chief executive of Bluesign Technologies, Peter Waeber, sounds less sure about it all. He's still certain about the need to create a more sustainable textile supply chain, the cause for which he created Bluesign at the end of the 1990s (setting it up as a company in its own right in Switzerland in 2000). But, in his capacity as a seasoned chemist and textile engineer, he has doubts about how much help list after list can really provide.

Everyone wants greener chemistry. Colour and specialty chemicals manufacturer Archroma has launched a range of nature-inspired dyes called EarthColors.

Archroma

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20 years of RSLs

"We've had RSLs for 20 years," he says, "and they don't work. And I don't think MRSL is a solution either, not in such a complex supply chain. Then we have the Higg Index, which centres on self-assessment and that's not enough either." He goes on to say that the global textile and garment industries already have access to an MRSL, in the form of his organisation's new BlueXpert online tool, which became in 2015. It uses the company's 'Bluesign bluefinder' database of 6,000 'safe' chemicals, so-called because they meet a whole range of companies' restricted substance list demands and also the requirements of Greenpeace with 'best available technology'. Chemicals groups Archroma, DyStar and Huntsman Textile Effects worked with Bluesign on the project, which was first announced at a conference Bluesign organised in July 2015.

This focus on chemicals is essential, he points out, because no matter what companies seek to achieve, from optimising their water treatment to prioritising consumer safety, it's chemicals they need to control. "Everything starts with chemistry, whether we like it or not," Mr Waeber continues. "A simple softener may have 30 components, so to be able to manage that, and all the other products we use, we need data. It made sense for us to introduce the BlueXpert because we already had data on so many chemicals and had already collected enough information to identify the best available technology on the chemical side. And, yes, we need to link this to good machinery and good process technology because everything is connected and everything belongs together."

Fewer but better chemicals

He insists that the industry needs education, first and foremost, plus ongoing innovation from the chemicals industry to help textile and garment manufacturers use fewer but better chemicals in future. He says it's time to stop focusing on the milligrammes (a reference to testing for tiny quantities of potentially hazardous substances that might be in a particular finished product) and concentrate on the mega-tonnes (the huge volumes of resource that our footwear and clothing are consuming). "There's no point testing a finished product," he insists. "It's ready to be sold and the brands just want to sell it."

Speak the truth

Peter Waeber's directness is refreshing, but he tells *WSA* that, by saying, for example, that RSLs don't work, he is only doing his job. "It's my job to tell the truth," he continues. "Mark & Spencer introduced RSLs in the 1990s. Is anything different today? No, nothing is different. So why do we keep doing the same things?"



Peter Waeber founded bluesign to bring together companies in all parts of the textile supply chain so that they can work together to reduce their impact on people and the environment. He's more committed to the vision than ever, but does not believe restricted substance lists will be of much help in making it a reality.

Bluesign Technologies

There are two related problems at the root of all of this, he says (with ongoing candour): money and the short-term approach to life, the universe and everything that most big apparel brands are intent on adopting. "Brands make good money," the Bluesign chief executive continues, "but they spend it on marketing and on paying multimillion dollar contracts to athletes. Then, when they come to talk to their partners in the supply chain, all they want is a cheap price. I've been in this industry for decades and the first question is always about price. The brands want green chemistry, but they don't want to pay for it. This is a cheap industry and that's why there is hardly any innovation any more; innovation means research and development and research and development costs a lot of money."

Suppliers to the brands would like to do things better, he concludes, and could do so if the brands would pay just a little bit more, say 20 cents more for a T-shirt. "Their supply chain partners could do a lot with the extra 20 cents," Peter Waeber says, "but they don't get the chance. The opposite is happening: the brands want to pay 20 cents less. We all need to do better. If it's true that, at current rates of consumption, we are using up 1.7 planets' worth of resources per year, it has to change, or future generations will have to try to sort out the problems we have caused, which isn't fair."

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