

Swiss clothing brand Calida took the chance to become the first company in its corner of the market to use Made in Green labels.

Calida

SUSTAINABILITY: MADE IN GREEN

Certification body Oeko-Tex has been encouraging use of its Made in Green label on clothing as a means of giving smartphone-wielding consumers almost instant access to detailed information, not just about the product and the brand that is selling it, but about that brand's suppliers, too, with particular emphasis on their treatment of people and of the environment. Swiss clothing brand Calida is one of the first to embrace the idea.

Transparency, the next big trend

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Swiss clothing brand Calida and testing and certification organisation Oeko-Tex have been speaking publicly about the need for greater transparency in the children's clothing supply chain. Together they took part in a discussion forum on the subject at the 2016 Kind + Jugend children's and young people's fashion exhibition in Cologne in September.

In the build-up to the event, Oeko-Tex said labelling children's clothes to assure parents the products are free from potentially harmful substances is one thing, but that giving them assurances of good environmental practice upstream and of fair treatment for textile workers is more challenging. Oeko-Tex believes that wider use of its Made in Green label on clothes would help put parents' minds at rest over this issue.

The Made in Green label provides information on the country in which production took place and which production facilities were involved. It also provides verification by an independent resource that the labelled textiles have been tested for harmful substances and that they have been manufactured using environmentally friendly technologies and in a socially responsible manner, that they are "proven to be safe in terms of human ecology", as Oeko-Tex has put it.

Directly onto the product

The certification body took over the Made in Green label from Spanish textile industry body Aitex towards the end of 2014 and said it intended to use Made in Green as a replacement for its Standard 100plus certification. General secretary Dr Jean-Pierre Haug said at the time this was "a logical enhancement" of his organisation's product portfolio. He added that, through the now widespread use of quick response (QR) codes on labels, posters and other materials and of smartphones with which consumers can scan the codes and gain access to the information, Made in Green offers companies in the textile industry "the perfect tool" for communicating their commitment to sustainability, putting this message "directly onto the product".



The Made in Green logo aims to give consumers transparency, which in turn will build confidence.

Oeko-Tex

On message

An Oeko-Tex member for 20 years, Calida was quick to express an interest. According to its materials, sourcing and quality manager, Stefan Kehrer, it's always on the lookout for new ways to put its message across and liked the idea of becoming the first brand in its corner of the clothing market to have Made in Green labels and has signed up.

Based in Sursee, near Lucerne, Calida has been specialising in underwear and nightwear



Oeko-Tex and Calida agree that supply chain transparency is set to become an important trend in the apparel market.

Oeko-Tex

since its foundation in 1940. It employs 1,400 people across the group and has more than 120 own-brand retail stores in Germany and Switzerland alone (plus representation in another 18 countries), addressing the market for women and men as well as children. It sells some swimwear too, now, but intimate apparel and pyjamas and nightshirts are still the mainstay, with cotton, Modal and Tencel the fabrics of choice.

Ethical production

For David Pirscher, who is responsible for product and business development at Oeko-Tex, the big benefit for Calida in using Made in Green labels is that it takes the consumer beyond product care, product origin and product safety towards an independent guarantee of environmental care and ethical production all the way along the supply chain. "This is all about transparency," he explains, "and transparency is becoming more and more important. Transparency is going to be one of the next big trends because it creates confidence and builds trust." People may know the brand, he continues, and be able to see and feel that a garment is well constructed and appears to be of good quality, but this initiative will also allow them to see if the brand's suppliers are good companies, too, which means more than just being able to produce good fabric.

In Calida's case there is "complete transparency" regarding fabric suppliers, Stefan Kehrer says. He adds: "Just by using their smartphones, our customers can now see right into our supply chain, which means we are offering them complete transparency."

An advantage earned

Mr Kehrer concedes that this may be easier for his company than for many clothing brands in the market today, but that's as a result of sourcing its materials with great care, which carries a cost. Around 80% of Calida's suppliers are European and 50% of fabrics are produced in Switzerland. By the end of this year, all of these suppliers will have achieved Oeko-Tex's Sustainable Textile Production (STeP) certification. He recognises that this less extended supply chain gives his company "a big advantage", but it's one that it has chosen to build for itself and one that it is prepared to pay for, confident that its customers will continue to demand extra quality and extra reassurance and be willing to pay a premium for it.

"We want to tell people about it," he continues. "We want our customers to trust us and we recognise that it's becoming more and more important for them to have visibility into the whole supply chain, from the yarn producer to the spinning mill to the fabric manufacturer to the vendor. Our customers want to know where their garments come from and we are happy to tell them."

Made in Green

2006 Launched in Spain by textile industry body Aitex.

2014 Acquired by Oeko-Tex, replacing its Standard 100plus certification.

2016 First company's take up using the Made in Green label.

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