

Editorial: Responsible sourcing, traceability and workers' rights in the textile and apparel industry will be hot topics in 2018

<https://marketpublishers.com/r/E2F888C69D4EN.html>

Date: December 2017

Pages: 14

Price: US\$ 350.00 (Single User License)

ID: E2F888C69D4EN

Abstracts

Fibre, textile and apparel companies are increasingly being held to account for the content and raw materials used in their products and for the sustainability and working conditions in the farms and factories where such content is sourced from. It is no longer sufficient for manufacturers, retailers and brands to ensure that corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles are maintained only by themselves. They must also ensure that such principles are maintained by all of the participants along their supply chains. Consequently, identification technologies are becoming increasingly important so that manufacturers, retailers and brands can trace where the raw materials in their products came from. The potential consequences of not knowing where or how materials are made came into sharp focus in 2017 with the publication of a report by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) on the treatment of workers in ten different countries. The report, called the ITUC Global Rights Index 2017, listed the ten worst countries in the world for workers' rights and, alarmingly, most of these countries are significant suppliers of fibres, textiles and/or clothing to the international market. Abuses of workers' rights extend from the less serious to what could be seen as the most serious of all. According to the ITUC, workers in some countries—including, among others, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Peru and, surprisingly, Italy—actually lost their lives because of their trade union activity. Other countries which were given a poor score included Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Vietnam. In 2018 supply chain participants will find themselves under increasing pressure not only to reassure their customers that the materials they supply are produced in accordance with CSR principles but also to provide proof that this is the case. It can be expected therefore that supply chain participants will come under increasing scrutiny from other participants in the chain—as well as from their customers.

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