

TEXTILE LABELING - IS IT ADEQUATE TODAY?

by

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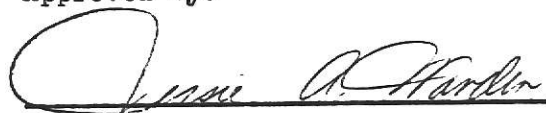
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	ii
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	iv
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE . . . . .	4
Textile Bill and Provisions . . . . .	4
Viewpoints Concerning the Bill . . . . .	6
Consumer Protection Promotion . . . . .	11
III. PROCEDURES . . . . .	21
IV. FINDINGS . . . . .	23
V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	29
REFERENCES CITED . . . . .	31
APPENDIX . . . . .	33

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Retailers' Responses Related to the Need of More Informative Labeling . . . . .	25
2. Retailers' Responses to the Need for the Addition of Care Instructions and Serviceability Features to the Current Labeling Law . . . . .	26
3. Retailers' Recommendations on the Type of Garment Labels That Should be Used . . . . .	27



## INTRODUCTION

The Textile Fiber Products Identification Act (TFPIA) was passed to provide disclosure of component ingredients, net contents, and other terms of service or care information for textile fiber products. It is assumed that the next level of disclosure of textile information would be a product's performance characteristics (24). Since the fiber identification bill is now ten years old, the assumption of this study is that the retailers believe the information provided on current textile labels is not adequate to meet the needs of the consumer.

A few provisions of the fiber identification bill are the disclosure of fiber content, protection to businessmen against unfair competition, and establishment of a classification of fibers and definitions. Other provisions and strengths of the bill are: (1) provides for the name or other identification of the manufacturer of the product; (2) discloses the name of the country where an imported textile fiber product was processed or manufactured; (3) provides for protection for consumers with a statement to the effect that an upholstered product, mattress, or cushion containing stuffing that previously had been used in any other upholstered product be labeled as such; (4) provides for the designation of the percentage of each fiber present, by weight, in the total fiber content (25).

At the time the first fiber labeling bills were passed in the late 1930's few man-made fibers were available and our markets were relatively less complicated and wise selections were not as difficult as

today with the wide choice of fibers, fabric constructions, and finishes. Technology and an affluent society with new wants, needs, and desires have further complicated wise choices of textile fiber products. At the time the TFPIA bill was passed it was recognized that it "provided only part of the information needed for making a wise decision" (25,p.94). A review of the literature indicated that between 1960 and 1964 there was a substantial decrease in the number of articles written disapproving and criticizing the labeling bill. The review did not uncover any reference to additions or alterations in the provisions to keep up with the rapidly changing textile developments. However, it seems reasonable to assume that through its use there have been some changes made in the interpretation of the bill.

In the past ten years innovative developments have occurred in textiles and wearing apparel that have produced vast arrays of new fibers, fabrics, and finishes. The flood of new textiles is causing unusual problems for consumers in making an informed selection and problems for drycleaners and launderers (8). Certain textile products require special care procedures or techniques that should be followed in laundering and cleaning, both professionally and at home, to insure that the utility and appearance of the product will not be impaired by shrinking, stretching, or fading (5).

The consumer is affected by the limited amount of information provided on labels because of his lack of knowledge about the characteristics of fibers. The information supplied is usually in the form of detachable labels or tags that easily may be lost or destroyed before or after the purchase, so the information is of little value to the user. The fact that the labeling bill does not require service and care

information on sewn-in labels is considered a major weakness of the bill. The consumer's dissatisfaction with a garment's performance may result in the retailer's loss of the consumer's business and the consumer's rejection of the manufacturer's brand, wherever he may come across it.

Weaknesses of the fiber identification bill given in the preceding paragraph support the assumption that the TFPIA is not adequately meeting the needs of the textile market today. As indicated by journal articles authorities in government, business, industry, and homemaking back this assumption. The establishment of the Voluntary Glossary Guide is one indication of industry's support of a need for more information (11).

It is the objective of this report to study retailers' expressions of the adequacy of the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act in meeting the needs of the market today in providing serviceability and care information to consumers. Implications from this research could be used as background for further advocacy of improved garment labeling.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the years the United States has had many battles among various segments of its population. Not all the battles were fought in the traditional manner with guns and ammunition on a battle field. Some were carried out through news media, in consultations, in the community courthouse, and in our national battlefield--the houses of Congress. It is not surprising to hear that our present labeling law, the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act (TFPIA), was a result of a so-called "battle of the fibers" (17,p.21). A long time controversy between the natural fiber producers and the man-made fiber producers finally culminated when the rapid development of the man-made fibers, known best by their trade-names, forced strong competition with the well-established cotton fiber names. As a result, the cotton fiber producers wanted definite percentages of individual fibers listed on a label to advertise fiber content (17). This was the original thought behind proposing such a textile fiber bill in Congress. However, the bill was broadened in scope as it was being formulated.

### Textile Bill and Provisions

To understand the approvals and disapprovals raised about the bill and the impact the bill had on society as a whole, it is necessary to review the bill, its objectives, and regulations as it became effective March 3, 1960. The two major objectives of the Act are:

- (1) "To provide consumers with truthful disclosure of fiber content.
- (2) To protect producers, manufacturers, and distributors from the hidden presence of substitutes or mixtures in textile fiber products" (7,p.6).

The stated purpose of the Act is "to protect producers and consumers against misbranding and false advertising of fiber content of textile fiber products" (26,p.18190). The rules of the Act cover all major textile fiber products, such as articles of wearing apparel, bedding, handkerchieves, scarves, draperies, towels, tablecloths, umbrellas, flags, furniture slip covers, and cushions (7). It does not include such products as: secondhand household textiles; coated fabrics; products made by company store operators and sold only to their employees; and such small items as belts, suspenders, and shoelaces (7).

The Act provides that a tag, stamp, label, or other means of identification giving the following information must be affixed to textile fiber products subject to the Act:

- (1) "The constituent fiber or combination of fibers in the textile fiber product.
- (2) The percentage of each fiber present, by weight, in the total fiber content.
- (3) If an upholstered product, mattress, or cushion contains stuffing in any other upholstered product, there must be a statement to this effect.
- (4) The name or other identification of the manufacturer of the product or one or more persons subject to the Act.
- (5) For imported textile fiber products the name of the country where the product was processed or manufactured must be disclosed along with the required content and identification disclosures" (25,p.92).

The Act was so written that the "stamp, tag, or label is supposed to remain on the product until it is sold or delivered to the ultimate consumer" (25). The Act allows for additional information to be permitted that does not violate the act. The TFPIA is in addition to existing laws, including the Wool Products Labeling Act of 1939 (18).

The enforcement of the bill is by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) under the Federal Trade Commission Act. The Commission has the power to make rules and regulations, to inspect, test, and examine products, and to obtain injunctions in Federal District Courts to restrain a person from unlawful acts. The criminal penalty set up for violations of the bill include fines of not more than five thousand dollars, imprisonment for not more than one year, or both (18).

The FTC established generic names where it was applicable for man-made fibers. Definitions (were given) on the basis of the broad chemical composition of each class of fibers. These generic names and definitions (were) not established on the basis of quality. The object was "to identify the fiberforming substance in the particular class of fiber" (26,p.18190).

#### Viewpoints Concerning the Bill

The proposal and formulation of the rules brought varied views from millmen, producers, manufacturers, professional organizations, retailers, and consumers. Some of the comments made prior to or soon after the passage of the bill are given to show how some could foretell the strengths and weaknesses.

Industry's Views. Millmen and producers were at odds during the proposal of the controversial TFPIA. The millmen and apparel manufacturers called the measure "useless Legislation". While the fiber producers, who were the chief proponents of the bill, wanted to see definite percentages of individual fibers listed on the labels (17,p.6).

According to Textile World, the millmen making the blended fabrics were particularly opposed to the bill because mere fiber identification, they said, (would) not give any real clue to the end use of the fabric. Millmen work primarily toward production of fabrics engineered for specific end uses, and they hold that the "only true criteria for the quality of a fabric is its performance" (17,p.7). It stated that while retailers had sided with the millmen in opposing the bill the retailers would like to see informative labeling but "do not want the higher prices and policies that mandatory labeling would bring" (17,p.7).

This opposition by the millmen, converters, and garment manufacturers became even more profound after the bill was passed in August of 1958 and the FTC had published its rules for enforcement on June 2, 1959. According to McCollough (15), one fabric manufacturer estimated that he would have to add at least seven persons to his payroll just to keep the complicated records required under the law. McCollough stated that the new law imposed labeling requirements on garment makers; imposed on mills a burdensome duty for keeping accurate records of fiber percentages and blends, and certifying such records to purchasers as a guarantee; and required expensive record keeping for the entire industry. Large sections of the textile industry and garment manufacturers painfully concluded that they had been hit hard over the head. He recommended that the textile industry try to live up to the law and if certain extreme hardships on the industry were encountered, steps should be taken to correct such inequities by amendment of the law or the rules (15,p.29).

A suggestion was made by the Modern Textile Magazine (6) that industry form a strong industry wide council to be composed of heads of

the industry's trade associations for the purpose of studying the affects of the law. The council would collect experiences under the law and compare notes as to where the law should be reasonably amended. The next step for the council would be to bring about changes in the law wherever such changes were dictated by common sense and that enforcement be not destructive of the best interests of the textile and allied industries.

Just a month after the bill came into effect, March 1960, Quinn (19) brought out the fact that to keep up with the rate in which man-made textiles were being introduced would be quite a task. According to him, on the heels of the new labeling law would come a multitude of new trade-marked fiber fabrics, each with its own distinct virtues and performance values. All this would require the consumer to have a greater knowledge of fiber terminology. He stressed that when consumers return items which begin to show some type of failure early in their use and explain reasons the garment did not meet expectations they would be helping to develop textile standards.

Retailer's Views. Labarthe (13) speaking for the National Retail Merchants Association gave an affirming point of view. He said that the retailers were generally hopeful there would be some kind of federal legislation making it mandatory to identify the fibers in a fabric or garment in the order in which they occur in the blend. Labarthe went on to emphasize the importance of making this information available on permanent sewn-in labels to enable the consumer, his cleaners, and launderers to do a better job in cleaning, thus minimizing the danger of shrinkage, of color change, or of "glazing or melting during pressing".



At the time of his statements, there were several bills currently before Congress urging the informative labeling of man-made fibers; but it was Labarthe's opinion that, "considering the versatility of cotton and of natural fiber, the informative labeling should be universal as far as the fiber origin was concerned" (13,p.643). This label would not be any indication of the serviceability of an item, rather it would serve as a guide to the kind of care to be given in cleaning. The informative label would be a guide to help the consumer get his money's worth. To be a good consumer takes much study and a consumer's poor choice should not be blamed on the retailer, according to Labarthe. When a consumer buys a product, he confirms the retailer's judgement.

According to a study of Indiana retailers' views toward labels and information done by Miller (16), most buyers for retail stores believed that fiber content and instructions for care of the garment should be stated on the label. Although this research was done more than ten years ago it is believed to contain pertinent information related to the current study. One of the retailers in Miller's study opposed informative labeling on the grounds that consumers (were) not interested and (did) not read labels. Miller mentioned that the buyer thought the additional cost of a labeling program was unwarranted. In her study 82.5 percent of the retailers checked on the questionnaire that they "always" read labels on garments and that 100 percent of those questioned believed that labels helped them formulate selling points.

Consumer Organizations' Views. Committees of two influential organizations, the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) and the

Textile Distributor's Institute, met separately following the passage of the bill, and prior to the FTC's formulation of rules and regulations, to submit questions and recommendations to be considered by the FTC. The manufacturers were concerned with the complications they would face in trying to identify every fiber present in a product and how to deal with changes in fiber properties attributable to application of finishes (6). Petzel (18), chairman of the AHEA committee, recommended informative labeling of textile products which would include performance or end use standards presented on permanently affixed labels for the consumer's use in care and maintenance. Petzel continued by stressing that the manufacturers would bear the predicted increased costs of labeling, advertising, and keeping records. She also gave names of individuals and groups who supported and opposed the bill. The following were supporters:

"American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Cotton Council of America, the National Grange, Forstmann Woolen Company, and Acting Secretary of Agriculture. Organizations favoring the bill with certain amendments were: E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, Chemstrand Corporation, the Mail Order Association of America, the Boston Wool Trade Association, the National Wool Trade Association, the Clothing Manufacturers Association of the U.S.A., and the National Women's Neckwear and Scarf Association."

The following are those who opposed the bill:

"Joint Committee on Labeling of Textiles and Apparel, the Popular Priced Dress Manufacturers Group, Inc., and Secretary of Commerce, Sinclair Weeks" (18, pp. 411-412).

Consumer's Views. In one phase of Miller's study (16), she found that the customer most frequently wanted to know the performance that could be expected from a garment and the care it would require. The label on the garment most frequently stated the price and size, then fiber

content. Least frequently, she found that it stated the performance a garment would give and the care necessary for best results. It was Miller's belief that this evidence seemed to indicate that consumers were conscious of the need for better informative labels and asked for the information from the salesperson when it was not found on the label.

#### Consumer Protection Promotion

The early sixties, between 1960 and 1964, showed a lack of literature concerning the new labeling law, indicating an acceptance by the textile industry and garment makers. To this date the literature reviewed showed no amendments to the TFPIA nor changes in the rules. However, it did not remain this way.

The 1960's brought consumer frustrations in the marketplace. Bishop (3) attributed much of the consumers' frustration to the technological progress, which brought man marvels never before dreamed of, but with it came confusion and perils the consumer could not have foreseen. He mentioned the growth of our economy and the dramatic changes in our way of life as contributing factors. The situation was not the same when the range of goods available for consumption was narrow, the family needs were basic, and there was a personal and direct relationship between the buyer and seller. Bishop (3) said there was little room to breed abuse in the simplicity of the marketplace.

In today's textile markets, the task of trying to keep up with the rate in which man-made textiles, finishes, dyes, and blends are being introduced, makes it almost impossible to be currently informed (5). Making a purchase is a puzzling experience, because none of us is equipped

to judge wisely the merits of hundreds or perhaps even thousands of products we buy (Schoenfeld and Natella,20).

Government's Role. Changes in the marketplace revived another era of interest in consumer protection. In 1962 President Kennedy recognized that consumers were facing problems in the market and declared four basic consumer rights:

"The right to be informed.  
The right to safety.  
The right to choose.  
The right to be heard" (9,p.6).

When Lyndon Johnson became President, he set up the first Presidential office devoted to consumer affairs, and later appointed Betty Furness as his Special Assistant in charge of the office. She was appointed at a time when there was an enormous need to turn the whole consumer philosophy of life around. The philosophy of caveat emptor, let the buyer beware, was to die hard (9). Men and women had to be convinced they had rights and that they should voice their complaints and frustrations (9). The consumer began to realize the increased importance of information and protection, and the introduction of legislation mushroomed. It has been going in many directions since then---from cigarette warnings, to more labeling on packaged goods, drugs, appliances, and to safety provision standards. In the textile world the textile fiber products labeling is being attacked to provide more information in the way of care instructions (5). The consumer is encouraged to "scream" if her child's clothes come apart at the seams the first time they are washed (9). The voice of the consumer has become very powerful today both politically and economically.

We have given the consumer more and more in the way of products and now she is demanding more information in return.

Industry's Role. In an article written in the American Textile Reporter (11), were guidelines developed in an attempt to assist the consumer in knowing how to care for both familiar and unfamiliar fibers, fabrics, and apparel. The guidelines were set up in cooperation with the government, but without government interference. The Voluntary Industry Guide for Improved and Permanent Care Labeling of Consumer Textile Products was adopted in 1967 in hopes that the majority of the industry groups would follow this guide voluntarily, and thus, avoid government rules and regulations. It consists of a glossary of terms that manufacturers are supposed to include in merchandising, tagging, and labeling. The seven categories that headed the glossary of terms included in the guide were: washing, machine and non-machine methods; all methods of drying; ironing and pressing; all procedures for drycleaning; fur and leather cleaning; and terms for use when cleaning with special procedures were necessary to improve the care of the textile products (11). The guide placed the responsibility for correct care on the consumer once processors and manufacturers had correctly tagged the garment (11).

"In regard to commercial or professional cleaning, the guide attempts to set forth procedures which would avoid the wrong type of cleaning process; ensure the correct type of process when only that type will assure the best overall care for the item; settle consumer doubts as to which process or processes could be used; and introduce uniform care and cleaning processes for man-made fibers" (11,p.39).

Johnson (12), representing the National Institute of Drycleaning (NID), made a statement in the FTC hearing on Care Labeling of Textile

Products concerning the main weakness believed to be in the Voluntary Label Guide. The criticism the NID had was that the guide did not contain any definition of what "normal care practice" was for consumer products. It merely presumed such understanding. Johnson, spokesman for the NID, believed the Voluntary Guide would have served an important consumer and trade education purpose had it defined normal care practice for general categories of fabrics and articles (12,p.3).

Laun (14), president of Celanese Fibers Marketing Company, speaking from the manufacturers viewpoint, said he believed that consumers were educated by their own frustrated experiences as consumers and by the supporters of the consumer legislation. According to him if industry and the consumers of its products (had) adequately educated each other and displayed mutual confidence there would be no consumer legislation. He went on to state that today's mass production, mass advertising, and mass retailing, all combine to leave the consumer feeling left out and helpless even though these "mass" factors do bring many benefits to the consumer. Laun referred to garments as having the obvious values of fashion and price, but also having hidden values. We do not always know if a garment will snag, lose its shape, whether its dyes will run or fade, or whether it will look the same during an expected wear life, and these factors and more are the hidden values of a garment. Laun realized that the consumer did complain but it was to (the) dry cleaner, husband, neighbors, friends, relatives, legislators, rarely did he complain to the retailer. Even more rarely, he said, did the retailers report to the manufacturers. To him the big question was how to add the hidden value performance to the two

way communication system that now includes fashion and price. Celanese advocated the use of permanent labels as one aid to communication.

Retailer's Role. Schoenfeld and Natella (21) stated that ignorance of the marketplace was not confined to anyone group in our society. They said it was a known fact that even the most highly educated were often "taken in". It was their belief that if consumers would buy only the best, then producers would only produce the best. The vast assortment of fabrics and finishes has made it difficult for the consumer to know how to properly care for a garment. According to them there was a growing need to provide more informative labeling and affixing the label to the textile product in a permanent manner.

Another speaker for retailers, Yunich (27), believed consumers needed to be informed and educated to handle problems in today's market. He recommended that education was needed at the consumer level and at the salesclerk level. He gave the example that consumers read ads and watch television about drugs but in the end, the consumer relies on his physician to perscribe the correct one. Yunich (27) poses the question of; "Where is the source of reference when the consumer confuses Zipel and Zefran?" His answer was that it should not be the salesclerk since some of the busiest and most productive periods are covered by salespeople with the least experience. The education of the consumer should be a joint effort of the whole industry. Retailers need manufacturers help.

There are certain actions retailers should take if they are to remain the purchasing agents for the consumers, according to William Batten (1), chairman of the board for J. C. Penny Company. A customer's



satisfaction depends upon some conditions beyond the retailers control. Manufacturers often build into products characteristics that retailers cannot change. However, he stated it was the responsibility of retailers to see that the customer's message was delivered to the manufacturer and to urge that action be taken. According to him, retailers should act as market research centers for manufacturers by identifying customer wants, preferences, and areas of dissatisfaction, and communicating them back to the producers. In all fairness, the consumer has a right to expect certain things from the retailer. The responsible retailers agree that consumers have a right to expect sufficient information so that they can make intelligent buying decisions. Batten also stressed the need for reasonable descriptions of performance expectancy. That care instructions should be extremely accurate and written in laymen's language, which not only could be clearly understood, but clearly could not be misunderstood.

Bliss (2), executive Vice President of the National Retail Merchants Association (NRMA), recommended that it would be wise for retailers to remember that today the consumer has a political as well as an economic ballot, and his "friendly legislator knows how many votes a consumer protection law can attract" (2,p.5). In the past few years legislation has been largely beneficial to the consumer without unduly hampering the manufacturers and retailers, said Bliss. However, he believed a critical point had been reached and an earnest race was being run to give the consumer proper protection. He urged everyone in the industry to become involved and initiate his own program rather than fight against governmental involvement laws which had passed because of the industry's own inactivity. There is a definite need for manufacturers and



retailers to make the flow of information a constant factor in dealing with the consumers. Without this information there can be no consumer protection in the long run. Speaking for the NRMA, he encouraged the textile apparel industries to assume the responsibility for permanent care labels.

Riesner (20), president of Interstate Department Stores, Inc., called on retailers and manufacturers to stop studying and start acting to eliminate the source of consumer complaints. He looked at the new consumerism trend as an undisguised blessing meaning higher sales. He believed that more customers would buy more "when goods were properly labeled as to content, use, and price..., when advertising was truthful, and when quality was clearly visible" (20,p.6). Unless steps of evaluation were taken to eliminate the source of complaints, the cost to the consumer as well as to the supplier could be extortionate.

Riesner (20) blamed only business for the growing political involvement in consumerism. He pointed out that although dozens of consumer laws and regulations were passed during the 1960's at all levels of government, many businessmen had still drawn no conclusions as to their own actions. He believed that up to now, business had simply been reacting to government regulation.

There is a need to bridge the communication gap among industry, the retailer, and the consumer, according to Stavarakas (23), manager of J. C. Penny Company Merchandise Testing Center. Not all problems with products are a result of poor quality and too little information by industry. Consumers have ways of mishandling garments, said Stavarakas. He cited one example of consumer mishandling where nylon leotards had been dried in a hot oven. Stavarakas stated that the customer returned the

leotards with the suggestion that they be tagged "keep away from flame" (23,p.33).

Another problem he gave that industry and consumer face is fabrics treated with different finishes, such as denim jeans treated for soil resistance, which tested out "great" under laboratory conditions, but were terrible under household washing conditions. Here Stavrakas (23) suggested the use of university facilities to aid the retailers in research.

Stavrakas (23) recommended that retailers dig out information about what the consumer really needs to know. In addition he urged consumers to take their complaints to the retailer, who (must) make sure the manufacturer hears about it. Stavrakas (23) went further to call many garments hanging in stores "Christmas trees" covered with hanging tags, some of which conflict. He believed that the use of so many tags should be eliminated, with one tag sewn permanently into the garment to convey care instructions to the consumer. According to him the developing of standardized criteria for judging quality and for care should involve both industry and government and this should then be passed on to the consumer, via the one tag.

A current article by Greenwood (10), Warner's eastern retail training director, stated that some years ago, customers accepted retailers' and salesclerks' suggestions without argument. Today, it is different, she claimed, salesgirls are expected to know all about the merchandise. The consumers were more aggressive now because they want to know why they are paying higher prices and customers are entitled to know the benefits of the garment and its service. The more ammunition provided, the more retailers stay just one step ahead of the customer. She believed

that knowledgeable service has no substitute, especially with the variety of styles and fabrics available today.

Consumer Advocates Role. A 1970 report by Betty Furness (9) indicated that the consumer has more power today than ever before realized. According to her, this power the consumer has is in the form of purchasing power, and when properly applied or judiciously withheld, it could work wonders. Furness urged the consumer to take complaints to the store, and if the store would not make good, then write the manufacturer. Consumers complaining among themselves would not be enough. She stressed that industry would give consumers as good a product and as much information about it as they demanded. This would be done only if consumers would say what they want and what they would not put up with.

Another consumer protectorate, Dana (4), reported views of some consumers indicating that they were wanting not only a permanent care label giving fiber content, washing instructions, and size, but also the maker's name and address, and some kind of stated responsibility for that garment behaving as represented. Some consumers believed that some garment makers should have enough pride and confidence in their products to stand behind them publicly.

Dana told of another consumer who expressed her dissatisfaction with hangtags. The consumer believed that too many hangtags were lost before the garment was sold and even those that reached the purchaser were difficult to keep track of and relate to the proper garment over the life of the garment. In addition to this consumer's complaint was another mentioned by Dana where the consumer wanted to know who was responsible

for the way a garment behaved--or misbehaved. The consumer told of buying a thirty-five dollar suit that said dryclean only. During the first drycleaning the jacket lining shrank so much it pulled into shreds. Dana stated that the consumer would like to avoid this garment maker the next time.

A review of the literature revealed that a good many leaders in retailing and NRMA were concerned about the following factors: (1) the confusion in the marketplace with its vast array of fibers, fabrics, and finishes; (2) the need for educating both consumer and industry; (3) the communication between consumer and retailer and between retailer and manufacturer; (4) and the quality of products and kinds of labels being used. The majority of the literature found after the passage of the TFPIA was written by retailers. Such leaders as Bliss, representing the NRMA, stressed the importance of retailers and industry men becoming involved. According to the review of literature industry's primary concern appeared to be before the bill was passed.

The consumers were reacting to this protection emphasis with complaints to retailers and manufacturers. The demand for more information and accurate, permanently affixed information was evident.

## PROCEDURES

The views of owners and managers of twenty retail clothing stores in Manhattan and Salina, Kansas on the current practices of labeling garments were studied. It was believed that the TFPIA was not meeting the needs of retailers and consumers. Since retail establishments sometimes differ in their policies of promotion and use of care and service hangtags, stores with similar merchandise were selected on the assumption they would have similar policies of handling labels. All twenty specialty shops listed in current telephone directories of the two cities were asked to participate in the study. For the purpose of this study a specialty shop was defined as a class of retail institution that carries a limited variety of goods. These shops handle only one part of a single-line of convenience or shopping goods. This implies a limited line of merchandise. The majority of this business is done by independent small scale retailers (22).

Owners and managers of the specialty shops who had not been in some phase of retailing for at least ten years, the life of the TFPIA bill, and any retailers who opposed being interviewed, were eliminated from the sample. To provide for any necessary replacements of specialty shops to keep a total of twenty stores in the sample, a list was made of retail stores in both towns, other than specialty shops, whose major merchandise was clothing and textile items. Gift shops that carried foreign made clothes and mail order chains without ready-to-wear stock in the local store were not included in the list from which a part of the sample might be drawn. The original survey list was altered, because one store had gone out of business and one owner did not wish to be interviewed. From

the stores previously listed, an individually owned department store and a discount chain store were drawn randomly from a container as replacements.

Letters were sent to the Chamber of Commerce in each town informing them of the study and of the dates the survey would be conducted. An appointment for interview was made with each Manhattan retailer; appointments were not made prior to interviews with the Salina merchants. A letter explaining the purpose of the study was shown to each retailer at the time of the personal contact. An interview schedule (Appendix,p.34) was filled in by the researcher as she questioned each retailer.

Views of the owners and/or managers of the clothing shops were tabulated, and conclusions and recommendations were made from a descriptive analysis of the data.

## FINDINGS

The responses given by the retailers of the twenty stores were tabulated and placed in three groups, according to figures given by the merchants on the approximate price ranges for dress lines carried. This grouping was done to note whether retailers handling similarly priced merchandise held similar views about garment labeling. The groups results were: (1) a low price range (\$4.98 to \$35.00) consisting of five stores; (2) a medium range (\$7.98 to \$75.00) with six stores; and (3) a high price range (\$10.00 to \$250.00) comprised of the remaining nine stores. Stores included in the group with a high price range may not be what would be classified as a typically high price range for dresses in many cities; however, these figures reported were higher than those given by other merchants in the two Kansas cities.

Of the twenty retailers interviewed, fourteen were owners and six were managers of the stores. All but one of the retailers interviewed were female. Half of the total number of merchants had been in some phase of retailing for more than twenty years; five had been in business for fifteen years and four for ten years.

The majority of the stores, fourteen, were individually owned. Five stores belonged to chains and one store was a locally owned corporation.

When the owners or managers were asked if there was a need for more informative labeling, fourteen said yes and six said no. A comparison of stores selling dresses in three price ranges showed a definite difference in responses to the questions they were asked. Two respondents

from those selling dresses in the medium price range said that many people were unfamiliar with fibers and proper care methods.

The retailers of the highest priced merchandise gave more reasons for needing informative labeling than did those with lower priced dresses. Six women selling dresses from the high price group gave the same reasons for a need of informative labeling as was previously mentioned and three also mentioned the increased number of fibers and blends. Retailers selling the highest priced dresses reported more reasons for needing good labels than other retailers in the study. The responses mentioned by the merchants of the highest priced dresses were: (1) informative labeling as a protection for the manufacturer; (2) consciousness of the people today about labels; (3) retailers cannot tell customers how to care for garments; (4) the quality of workmanship has gone down; (5) and more labeling is needed as a protection for the consumer.

Not more than six retailers gave the same reasons for believing there was a need for informative labeling of textile products. No more than three people listed the same reason in any one price range group.

The owners and managers of stores selling the low and high priced dresses reported the only negative answers to the same question on the need for more informative labeling. The two owners in the high priced group gave the following reasons: (1) perfection of fibers; (2) consumers do not read the information; (3) current labeling is adequate; (4) and "almost everything is polyester and it is all care for in the same way-- anything other than polyester should have care instructions", stated one owner. Retailers selling dresses in the low price range indicated: (1) that consumers will not read the information provided; (2) labeling is



adequate; (3) and more labeling would mean additional cost to the garment. Two of the negative answers were given by the manager of the discount store, whereas the owner of the one department store was affirmative in her response to the need for more informative labeling. Table 1 summarizes the merchants' expressions on the need for informative labeling.

Table 1  
Retailers' Responses Related to the Need  
of More Informative Labeling

Responses	Responses by Price Ranges of Dresses Sold			
	Low n=5	Medium n=6	High n=9	Total n=20
Expressed need for more information	2	5	7	14
Expressed no need for more information	3	0	2	5
More blends	0	2	3	5
More fibers	0	1	3	4
Protection for retailer	0	3	2	5
People wash different ways	2	1	3	6
Different washing machines	2	0	3	5
Protection for manufacturer	0	1	1	2
Consumer conscious of labels	0	0	1	1
Garment care cannot be told to customer	0	0	1	1
Customer does not know fibers and how to care for them	0	2	0	2
Quality workmanship decreased	0	0	1	1
Protection for the customer	0	0	1	1

The retailers' responses to the question on whether there should be the addition of serviceability features and care instructions to the current labeling requirements were in favor of serviceability features and care instructions. The results of these responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Retailers' Responses to the Need for the Addition  
of Care Instructions and Serviceability  
Features to the Current Labeling Law

	Price Ranges of Dresses Sold			
	Low n=5	Medium n=6	High n=9	Total n=20
Serviceability features	2	5	6	13
Care instructions	5	6	8	18

When asked for recommendations about the type of label that should be used on garments, fifteen of the merchants mentioned that care instructions and serviceability information should be placed on permanent woven labels. Table 3 shows the retailers' responses to this question.

Table 3

Retailers' Recommendations on the Type of  
Garment Labels That Should be Used

Recommendations	Price Ranges of Dresses Sold			
	Low n=5	Medium n=6	High n=9	Total n=20
Single hangtag	0	2	0	2
Permanent, sewn-in label	3	4	8	15
Woven material	2	4	7	13
Both permanent and hangtag	2	2	2	6

According to ten owners or managers asked how the addition of serviceability features and care instructions could affect them and their business, this information would aid them in settling consumer complaints. Five merchants indicated that the inclusion of care and serviceability information would serve them as a selling device and four reported quality improvement as an outcome of better labeling. Other reasons given by the owners or managers were: (1) that trade would increase; (2) that customers would be more apt to buy; (3) the information would be an aid to the customer. The two negative responses to the same question were reported by one owner of a store selling dresses in the high price range. According to her, if care instructions and serviceability labels were required to be permanently sewn-into the neckline they would distract from the garment, while in a window or a department display.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this small study support the assumption that the retailers interviewed believe the information required by law on current textile labels is not adequate to meet the needs of the consumer. The viewpoints of owners and managers of clothing stores in two small cities in Kansas agreed with a number of the viewpoints given in the review of literature by retailers, textile executives, and representatives of consumer protection organizations. The increased number of fibers and blends available in the market was one reason given for a desire for more informative labeling. Responses by a number of retailers were concerned with the various washing methods used by the consumers, coupled with the differences in washing machines and settings.

The importance of including serviceability features and care instructions for garments was brought out by both the literature reviewed and the interviews with merchants. In general both believed that more information was needed than the disclosure of only fiber content and manufacturers name in today's market.

It was the consensus of those interviewed and views from review of literature that informative garment labels should be permanently affixed with accurate, easy to understand instructions.

Although a large majority of the consumer products currently being sold can be drycleaned or laundered satisfactorily by customary methods, it is the author's recommendation that it is desirable to provide essential care information to the consuming public. The increased array of fibers, fabric constructions, finishes, and products have made it

difficult for the consumer to select wisely. Such information as serviceability and care instructions in addition to the correct fiber content and manufacturers name on a permanent label would be a means of helping the consumer in his decisionmaking.

The author believes that more research is needed on the amount of care information currently being voluntarily provided in a permanent way. Since hearings are presently being conducted with the FTC concerning permanent care labeling, it would be valuable to study in the future, consumers reactions to sewn-in care instructions. Information thus stated would be useful as background for further advocacy of improved garment labeling.

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**APPENDIX**



7. Would you like to make any recommendation about the type of label which should be used on garments?

☐ single hangtag

☐ permanent, sewn-in label

☐ woven

☐ paper

☐ both permanent and hangtag with same information

☐ no recommendation (adequate as they are)

Others:

8. How would the addition of serviceability features and care instructions affect you as an owner or manager and your business?

affirmatively

☐ help settle consumer complaints

☐ selling device

☐ quality improvement

Others:

negatively

☐ reduction in sales due to increased cost

☐ labels may not be accurately attached

Others:

TEXTILE LABELING - IS IT ADEQUATE TODAY?

by

KAREN COVINGTON

B. S., Kansas State University, 1962

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Clothing, Textiles, Interior Design

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1970

Interviews were conducted with twenty retailers of clothing stores in Manhattan and Salina, Kansas. The purpose of the report was to study retailers' expressions of the adequacy of the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act in meeting the needs of the market today in providing information on care and serviceability of textile products.

Fourteen of the twenty retailers interviewed believed that today more informative labeling is needed. Reasons most often given for this need were: (1) a variety of laundry procedures; (2) differences in washing machines and settings; (3) increased variety of fibers and blends; (4) for the protection of the retailers.

The retailers recommended that there be serviceability features and care instruction provided on a permanent sewn-in label. Eighteen of the twenty suggested care instructions and thirteen of the twenty suggested serviceability features. Over half recommended that the labels be made of a woven material. The retailers believed the inclusion of care and serviceability features would aid them in settling consumer complaints.