

My stuff

Washing worries?

Helping you understand textile care labels

Have you ever shrunk a sweater or stained a shirt? Have you accidentally burnt or torn an item by ironing at too high a temperature? Do you ever wish your clothes would last longer without losing their shape or becoming discoloured?

Clothes are made using different materials and dyes and we need to know how to take care of each piece in order to ensure it lasts longer in good condition. The first care labelling symbols were designed and technically defined in the late 1950s. They were introduced following the arrival of new fibres, such as acetate, nylon, polyester and viscose, to help consumers care for their beloved shirts and trousers.

This independent care labelling code was established by the International Association for Textile Care Labelling (GINETEX). GINETEX is an international non-profit organization that cooperates with the entire textile chain and all relevant professional care sectors. It also participates, together with other industry experts, in the ISO technical committee responsible for textile care labelling symbols.

Understood everywhere

For over 20 years, ISO 3758:2012, *Textiles – Care labelling code using symbols*, has helped large parts of the global textile and clothing industry. It guides manufacturers, suppliers and retailers

with respect to the tests they should perform on materials and clothing to check for irreversible damage during washing and drying.

The symbols included on care labels also inform consumers and dry cleaners of the maximum treatment possible for washing, bleaching, drying, ironing and professional textile care.

Not as easy as it sounds

Standardizers face several challenges. Firstly, they must ensure care symbols are simple enough to be understood worldwide. Secondly, they must make their technical recommendations precise. And thirdly, they need to take into consideration the new technologies, devices, detergents and solvents that flood the market. For example, there is an ongoing debate on how care symbols can best reflect the increasing demand for environmentally friendly cleaning.

Finally, they must encourage global adoption of the standard in order to reap the full benefits. With the latest version of ISO 3758, published in 2012, we hope that countries like Canada, Japan, South Korea and the USA will increase their uptake of the ISO solution and adapt their regulations accordingly. Our vision is that consumers in all parts of the world should be able to understand clearly and unambiguously the same pictogram language! ■

“Care symbols should be simple enough to be understood worldwide.”



The author



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