



society of dyers  
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## Planet Textiles – Report

### Success of inaugural conference in Hong Kong

*Andrew Filarowski reports on the success of the inaugural eco-conference in Hong Kong at which our planet was very much the focus, with a call for an urgent need for change and new working practices in the textile industry.*

The inaugural Planet Textiles conference, which took place in Hong Kong in March running alongside Interstoff Asia Essential, was hailed as a major success by both speakers and delegates. With 140 people in attendance to discover practical ways of improving the environmental and social impact of the global textile and clothing supply chain, it was supported by leading industry organisations and international clothing retailers.

Planet Textiles, jointly organised by the publisher of *Ecotextile News*, Messe Frankfurt and the SDC, attracted leading brands and retailers such as Patagonia, Adidas, Nike, Sears and Triumph International, as well as giant textile mills such as Pacific Textiles, Hong Kong Non-Woven Industrial Co. and Fountain Set amongst many others. The event, with leading sponsor Huntsman, provided a fantastic line-up of speakers, an opportunity to learn from best practice and pick up practical advice, focus on the positive developments and changes and an opportunity for great networking and a platform for the exchange of ideas. Other sponsors included Clariant, DyStar and Lenzing.

### Sustainable future

The keynote address was delivered by Cara Chacon, director of corporate social responsibility (CSR) at Patagonia (USA), who discussed methods to manage sustainable change in a major retail organisation and across the supply chain. She provided details of the model used by the owner of Patagonia, Yvon Chouinard, for a sustainable and less environmentally damaging retail organisation together with some of the pitfalls that Patagonia has previously encountered. She highlighted Patagonia's online portal - 'The Footprint Chronicles' - which allows customers to track certain products through the supply chain and to calculate their environmental impact from design through to delivery.

An overview of China's first CSR management system and code of conduct for industry was given by Liang Xiaohui, from the Office for Social Responsibility at the China National Textile and Apparel Council (CNTAC). He informed delegates that over 200 Chinese textile and apparel companies have implemented the CNTAC CSC9000T scheme, which forms an important part of governmental industry regulation policy. As part of the system, CNTAC provides guidelines for textile companies to report their CSR through the *China Sustainability Reporting-Guidelines for Apparel and Textile Enterprises* system. The hope is that 500 companies register for CSC9000T by 2011 and 100 companies will have reported their actions by then.

Lyn Ip (Adidas Group, Social and Environmental Affairs Department, Hong Kong) gave a talk with a theme of 'integrating sustainability through the supply chain'. He highlighted the issues that have to be

looked at for a business to consider itself sustainable/more sustainable and outlined some of the initiatives that Adidas has taken part in, both internally and externally, by raising environmental awareness and promoting best practice.

### Case studies

The importance of sustainability being at the centre of all business activities was emphasised by Pat Nie Woo (Sustainable Fashion Business Consortium, Hong Kong), with a crucial point being that the issue of sustainability must be understood from the top down. He described the structural challenges he sees within companies and relational challenges between all in the supply chain. This will require that boundaries within the supply chain are redefined with a clearer focus on core competencies, and partnerships will have to take a longer view and work together for the greater good. Overall, the mindset of organisations needs to change to realise that sustainability is not an option, it is a must.

Geoff Collins (Lenzing, Austria) had as the tag line for his presentation - 'good for the people, good for the planet' - in which he outlined the three pillars of sustainability as environmental, economic and social. He described the life cycle analysis of Lenzing fibres, highlighting the relative environmental impact of the group's fibres in comparison to cotton (USA and China), with land use and water consumption as the key measures. The figures showed a massive difference for water usage in the production of Lenzing fibres over cotton with an improvement for land use which is significant. This highlighted the need for detailed analysis of processes throughout the life cycle before commenting on the sustainability of any particular fibre and the need for comparative data.

Another speaker who followed the life cycle of a product was Petra Katzenberger (KiK, Germany). As head of CSR for Germany's biggest clothing discount retailer, Petra highlighted the steps that the company had taken to assess and reduce the carbon footprint of a pair of jeans. The next phase of the process will be to look at ways in which KiK can work with suppliers to reduce the emissions during the production phase. It is encouraging to hear that a discounter is looking at its environmental impact in this way.

Lode Vermeersch (Huntsman, Switzerland) outlined a case study where sustainability in the supply chain was the focus for a textile processing mill (Masco Group, Bangladesh). The four areas to be assessed included: water footprint; energy profiles and resource utilisation; life cycle analysis; and carbon footprint. Having explained how to measure the overall impact from dyeing and finishing, Lode gave an example of the positive impact by the introduction of Huntsman's 'Gentle Power Bleach' system at the textile mill.

### Reuse and reduce

Simon Weston (Fountain Set, Hong Kong) provided the audience with his own experience of sustainability at Fountain Set and the practical issues and problems encountered. Having explained the options available in relation to the production facilities and the processes used, Simon brought in the concept of reuse or regeneration as a cost effective way of reducing the amount of waste produced, which in turn will reduce cost to dispose of such waste and reduces the overall cost of the raw materials.

Another sustainable model was put forward by Tone Tobiasson (Nordic Initiative Clean and Ethical, Norway). With the background of this initiative for Nordic wool outlined, the main objective of encouraging involvement of brands/retailers, fashion and producers was explained. This includes a ten-year plan for the fashion and apparel industry which will inform, inspire, assist and motivate the fashion industry to develop sustainable models.

## Open communication

Phil Patterson (RITE Group, UK) outlined how the big brands in Europe and the USA can engage more effectively with textile manufacturers in Asia. Phil reported the need for a more open approach to business, of greater communication between brands and the supply chain, and a need for a level playing field for all to be able to compete. There is a need for retailers and brands to look beyond the short term profits and be judged on the long term prospects in relation to a sustainable business model and its interaction with its supply base. There is a need for both retailers and suppliers to be known for the performance of their products and for taking a pride in who they work with. This means developing a long term strategy and relationships where the values of each partner are understood and valued.

Indeed, the need for open communication was very much the overriding message that came out of the conference. Sharing best practices in order to focus on the positive developments is crucial for a textile industry with a sustainable future. During the event itself, there were numerous opportunities for open communication when delegates could interact with the speakers and other experts in both the question and answer sessions and the dyeing and finishing clinic hosted by Huntsman.

Changing the culture of the industry in order to place sustainability at the heart of all organisations throughout the textile supply chain is no small task, but Planet Textiles certainly provided a unique and - it seems from the comments of some of the delegates - a truly vital platform in Asia for sowing the initial seeds of change. 'The concept of holding a major event on sustainable textiles in Asia is the right way forward,' said Hans Buehr, the head buyer in Asia for Triumph International, 'It seems like the launch of Planet Textiles has been a great success and we look forward to seeing it again in future.' Jane Clarkson, a materials director at Nike based in Hong Kong agreed, 'This is the sort of event that needs to occur on a regular basis in Asia,' she said, 'Planet Textiles was really useful and I'm already looking forward to the next one.' Keynote speaker from Patagonia, Cara Chacon, also commented that the event was useful for all the experts who spoke, 'I found the presentations to be really informative and useful. I met several key people...I thought the conference was immensely helpful for brands and factories...and hope to attend more of events like this in the future. Please keep me on your invite list!'

To view all the presentations from the conference, visit [www.planet-textiles.com](http://www.planet-textiles.com). It is hoped that Planet Textiles will be held on an annual basis alongside Messe Frankfurt trade shows. To be kept informed of future Planet Textiles conferences, please sign up for e-alerts by emailing: [info@planet-textiles.com](mailto:info@planet-textiles.com).

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