Big names join European textile recycling initiative

By Sandra Halliday - May 24, 2021

A raft of major names are taking part in a new textile recycling drive with the launch of the Sorting for Circularity Project that, as its name suggests, aims to improve textile sorting so more used textiles can be recycled rather than discarded.

Those brands and retailers taking part in the Fashion for Good-driven project include Bestseller, Adidas and Zalando as brand partners, as well as Inditex as an external partner. Fashion for Good partners Arvind, Birla Cellulose, Levi Strauss & Co, Otto and PVH are also part of the wider working group.

Bestseller said of its involvement that it wants to “advance Euro textile recycling”. It said the current textile sorting system, which relies heavily on manual input, “cannot provide accurate insights given often unreliable and absent clothing labels”. Linking with fashion For Good and other key partners, it said it’s aiming to address the challenge of too few textiles being reused “on a scale greater than ever before”.

The project will “conduct a comprehensive textile waste analysis using more accurate, innovative Near Infrared (NIR) technology, while also mapping textile recyclers’ capabilities”. This will lead to “an open digital platform to match textile waste from sorters with recyclers, enabling their alignment and building an infrastructure towards greater circularity in the years to come”.

The project brings together the largest industrial textile sorters in the North-West Europe region, including the Boer Group, I:CO, JMP Wilcox and TExAID. The French-accredited Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) eco-organisation Refashion, which is also a key project partner, provides input into the methodology and leads the NIR scanner calibration.

In essence, it should mean more good intentions being translated into positive action and less textile waste going to landfill as it will head back into the system instead. That in turn should mean less strain on the resources that new textiles use up and also less pollution being produced.

Dorte Rye Olsen, who heads Bestseller’s sustainability work, said the fashion giant expects its “investment and participation in the project will identify ways to create greater harmonisation between the sorting and recycling
participation in the project will identify ways to create greater harmonisation between the sorting and recycling industry. We hope to see that textile waste can become commercialised, while at the same time creating new business models for sorters and enhance levels of circularity across the industry”.

It’s an 18-month project that Fashion For Good MD Katrin Ley said wants to “create a greater link between textile sorters and textile recyclers; stimulating a recycling market for unwanted textiles that can generate new revenue streams for sorters.

“Traditionally, the sorting industry generates income through the sale of reusable textiles, with the remainder being downcycled, incinerated or landfilled. To achieve a circular system, a new end-market for non-reusable textiles is required, with an infrastructure and digital matching system that can support activities of sorters and recyclers.”

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