

Renewed greenwashing allegations against H&M / Kirsten Reinhold – TextilWirtschaft 16/11/22

The Swedish chain H&M must once again defend itself against the accusation that it is trying to profit from the "green consumer trend" in a "misleading, illegal and misleading way". That's the wording of a 55-page lawsuit filed in the U.S. Federal Court in Missouri. Accordingly, H&M is supposed to falsely suggest to customers that the products of the "Conscious Choice" line are an environmentally friendly purchasing decision. The two plaintiffs, Abraham Lizama and Marc Doten, describe H&M's sustainability messages in their indictment as "unlawful, unfair, misleading and misleading business practices".

In particular, it says: "Developing sustainability strategies based on the idea that consumers can continue to consume single-use plastic products, as they can be recycled into new products, is highly problematic. This method of 'green' marketing does not address the fundamental problem of single-use solutions and the excessive consumption of natural resources." These strategies encouraged consumers to buy more clothes or throw away clothes earlier, believing that they "can be recycled in a magic machine."

Focus on "Conscious Choice" products

The plaintiffs see the false promises mainly in the "Conscious Choice" line, which suggests that the garments are durable or more durable than other products, even though they are largely made of polyester or recycled plastics.

The applicants consider that this is a misrepresentation of products which are not intended to have a negative impact on the environment. The basis for the lawsuit is also that higher prices are charged for the Conscious Choice products. According to the website "The Fashion Law", this would give the claimants the opportunity to prove that they have "suffered necessary harm" and "have the right to prosecute".

More transparency promised

The Conscious Collection, with which H&M launched the first line of 'green materials' such as organic cotton, Tencel and recycled polyester ten years ago, has long been criticised. Only recently, the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) had identified the associated sustainability information on the webshop as unclear. As a result, H&M's "Conscious Choice Indicator" was removed from online stores around the world.

"We will continue to improve our overall transparency and the information we provide at the product level. We are confident that in the long run, stricter and clearer regulations regarding the proof of sustainability claims will move the industry forward and ultimately increase both transparency and comparability for our customers," announced the new sustainability manager for Germany, Victor Rybkin, in an interview with TW in early October.

H&M defends polyester use

Regarding the current allegations from the US, the German headquarters in Hamburg says: "We at H&M take allegations that question our commitment very seriously and investigate them thoroughly." The Group has been working proactively for many years to significantly reduce the use of fossil fuels for our products. Currently, cotton is the most commonly used material.

"About 20% of our material use is polyester, of which about 75% is already recycled polyester." The company will stick to this – despite general criticism of the use of artificial fibres. "We believe that synthetic fibers have important characteristics and benefits, such as greater durability. While we have a clear goal to move away from new fibres and materials based on fossil raw materials, we will continue to look for more sustainable, recycled alternatives."

In addition, we are continuously working on scalable solutions for recycling textiles. "Through our investment arm H&M CO:LAB, we invest in companies that develop technologies and software that enable the H&M Group to lead our industry towards a circular and sustainable future. We are pioneering the recycling of post-consumer textiles, such as HKRITA's Green Machine, and familiarize our customers with recycling options," explains a spokesperson.