# KILLER JEANS:

## a report on sandblasted denim

FAIR TRADE CENTER

Labour Behind the Label

Clean Clothes Campaign

## Killer Jeans

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## The organisations involved in this report:

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# Summary

Treating denim to make the fabric look worn or faded is common within the clothing industry. Different methods can be used to create the desired finishing effect. One such method is sandblasting, which can be extremely damaging to workers' health if performed without suitable protective equipment. The large amounts of silica dust generated during the process can cause silicosis, a potentially lethal pulmonary disease, as workers inhale the tiny particles of silica.

In 2009, Turkey prohibited manual sandblasting with silica, something that resulted in a major decline of the practice throughout the country. Until that time, manual sandblasting had been commonplace, especially within the informal sector.

Sandblasting was often performed by migrant workers[1] during long work shifts, in cramped, unhygienic treatment rooms without ventilation or safety equipment. In some cases workers even slept on site.

At the time that this report was published, approximately 50 people in Turkey had died as a direct result of exposure to silica dust whilst sandblasting denim. According to an estimate from the Turkish Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Labourers about 5000 people working in the clothing industry in Turkey may have developed silicosis.

Since the ban was introduced in Turkey the sandblasting industry has moved to other countries such as China, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Argentina and parts of Northern Africa. Little is currently known about the situations facing sandblasting workers in these countries, but NGOs and trade unions fear that the conditions are similar to those found in Turkey.

In this study, the Clean Clothes Campaign and Labour Behind the Label have investigated the way in which UK and international brands and retailers are tackling the dangers presented by sandblasting within their own supply chains. Since October 2010 over 80 European and international brands have been contacted by the different national Clean Clothes Campaigns in order to highlight the serious impact of the process on the health of workers. They were asked to provide information on the extent of sandblasting in their supply chains, their willingness to implement a ban on using the sandblasting process and steps they are taking to enforce it. We also asked what steps each brand will be taking to provide medical checks and compensation to those workers who have already been exposed to risk.

The majority of companies have now stated that they either never use sandblasting or that they are planning to ban and/or phase out the use of the process. This is good news, but it is not the end of the story. All companies must now join the fight to end sandblasting worldwide by publicly declaring a ban on this process. They must also show how they intend to implement the ban. Given the widespread failure of auditing to uncover supply chain violations such plans must move beyond a simple tick box question on factory inspections and should involve work with local groups.

Finally, those workers who have already been exposed to risk must not be forgotten. Thousands of workers have been employed in sandblasting units, many of them employed in the informal sector, without the resources to get expert medical advice on their illness. Most will have no idea that they could have this disease. Brands and retailers must issue medical checks, carried out by appropriate experts, to all workers employed in laundry facilities used in their supply chain. They must also be prepared to take responsibility for those affected by providing appropriate ongoing medical care and compensation.



# Introduction

Approximately five billion pairs of jeans are produced worldwide each year. With a long manufacturing history, they have been a popular item of clothing for several decades. Jeans were first used by dock workers in Genoa several centuries ago as they valued the material for its durability. However, it was not until the 1950s that jeans became a universal fashion item[2]. During the 1970s design and tailoring was central to denim culture, but it was not until the mid 1980s that manufacturers started using methods to make the material look worn. The first such method involved tearing the denim using brushing techniques. 'Distressed' jeans continued to be fashionable during the 1990s with brands such as Diesel and Replay playing an important role in driving the trend. Not until the following decade, however, did the fashion of wearing pre-torn jeans become a trend throughout the Western world, thus requiring new methods, including sandblasting.[3]

Whilst the use of sandblasting to achieve a worn-out look on denim is a relatively new phenomenon within the clothing industry, the method itself has been widely used within the mining and building industries for many decades. Manual sandblasting with silica was banned in the European Economic Community in 1966 due to the severe risks associated with the inhalation of silica dust. The UK prohibited this practice even earlier, in 1950.[4] Given the imposition of strict regulations on sandblasting in many European countries, the clothing industry has largely out-sourced production to as yet unregulated regions. Since 2000 sandblasting has mainly been located in countries such as Turkey, Syria, Bangladesh, Mexico, India and Indonesia. Since then it has moved even further, to unregulated regions such as South East Asia and North Africa. Silvana Cappuccio, a health and safety expert at the International Textile Garment & Leather Workers' Federation, states that production tends to move to regions where labour is cheap and legislation is weaker.[5]

## Aims and method

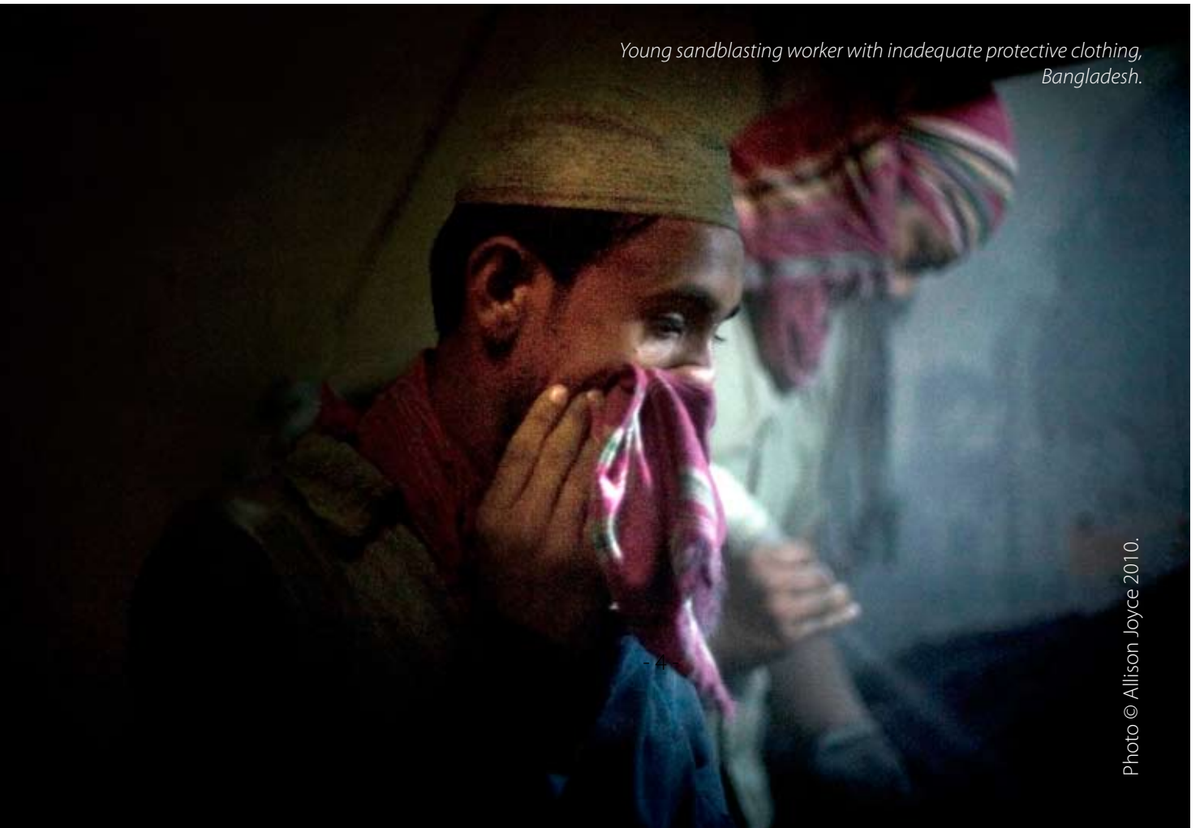
Labour Behind the Label hopes that this report will highlight the way in which clothing companies handle the risks associated with sandblasting. The study can be divided into two sections – one covering background information and the other focusing on corporate aspects. The background information was largely compiled by the Swedish Fair Trade Center using various reports and articles, as well as other relevant sources made available by the Swedish Work Environment Authority amongst others. In addition, interviews about sandblasting and silicosis were conducted at the European Regional Organisation of Workers in the Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear sectors conference in Istanbul held on 29 June - 1 July 2010.

The corporate section outlines the action that brands and retailers should be taking to address the serious health impacts of sandblasting. It provides information on the willingness of companies to publicly ban sandblasting processes and the steps they are taking to monitor and implement such a ban. We also look at what actions should be taken to identify and support those workers that have already been exposed to risk. The information is based on dialogue between the Clean Clothes Campaign and brands and retailers between October 2010 and March 2011. Dialogue with retailers will be continuing over the course of the Killer Jeans campaign and information about the progress brands and retailers are making in these different areas of action will be regularly posted on the Labour Behind the Label website.

# The sandblasting technique

There is a wide variety of denim product available on the market today. Jeans, the garments most commonly made from denim, are either left untreated or can be treated to achieve a worn look. The latter can be achieved in a number of ways, depending on the desired finish. Methods include manual or mechanical sandblasting; washing; stone washing; chemical treatment; laser treatment or manual treatment using sandpaper.

Sandblasting is most frequently used to treat jeans, but it can also be used on other denim garments such as skirts, dresses or jackets. The sandblasting technique aims to remove the dark indigo pigmentation from the garment. Propelling a stream of abrasive material (sand) against the fabric under high pressure gradually softens and lightens the denim. The desired finishing result can be achieved by increasing or decreasing the exposure. Whilst some factories use sealed blasting cabinets with ventilation, most require workers to operate the machinery in treatment rooms. The type of blasting material used can also differ. Certain materials can be re-used and others are disposable. In some cases ventilation in the cabinets sucks the blasting material through a filter, so that it can be re-used on another item of clothing.



*Young sandblasting worker with inadequate protective clothing, Bangladesh.*

Photo © Allison Joyce 2010.



# Sandblasting and silicosis

Sandblasting can expose workers to extreme health hazards. Some facilities use natural sand containing silica, meaning that workers inhale crystalline silica dust particles during production, causing serious damage to the respiratory passages.[6] These particles are so tiny that they are invisible to the naked eye.[7] The body is unable to expel the silica particles causing diseases such as silicosis.

The particles penetrate the pulmonary alveoli and the connective tissue, gradually impairing the lungs' capacity and their ability to oxygenate the blood. Symptoms include shortness of breath and, as the disease develops, this is common even when resting. This puts additional strain on the heart, eventually leading to death.[8] However, silicosis can be prevented if symptoms are diagnosed at an early stage.[9]

Silicosis is one of the oldest known occupational diseases and, when fully developed, it is chronic. Until recently, silicosis was found only amongst workers within the mining, construction, stone and excavation industries. It was also common amongst workers at iron foundries, steel plants and glass and ceramics manufacturers.[10]

Photo © ILO/Dr. NL Lapp and Dr. DE Banks .

According to the World Health Organisation, workers can develop three types of silicosis depending on the concentration of dust they are exposed to:

1. Chronic silicosis, which usually develops after 10 years or more of working in environments with relatively low concentrations of dust.
2. Accelerating silicosis, which develops between 5-10 years after first being exposed to the dust.
3. Acute silicosis, which develops following exposure to high concentrations of crystalline silica dust, and causes symptoms to appear from within a few weeks to 4-5 years after first being exposed.[11]

Sandblasters within the clothing industry are most likely to suffer from acute silicosis. Amongst textile sandblasting workers the symptoms have been extensive and, in comparison with other industries, the disease has developed quickly.[12]

## The use of complex and hidden supply chains, which characterises the garment industry worldwide, is largely responsible for the severe impact this manufacturing process is having on the health of sandblasting workers.

The sandblasting process is often outsourced to subcontractors[13] using uncontrolled and unregistered workshops that operate outside the formal sector. Many of these workshops are located in remote areas or in the basements of other workshops.[14] Hidden from view, these workshops are often cramped and dangerous and few provide protective equipment to their employees. The treatment rooms are cramped and poorly ventilated to prevent the escape of the dust, which may incur extra costs[15] and subcontractors may replace alternative, safer material with silica sand, which is significantly cheaper, when inspectors leave.[16]

# Turkey: uncovering sandblasting fatalities

"The first two textile workers to be diagnosed with silicosis were two men aged 18 and 19...Both men died shortly after being diagnosed."

Clothing and jeans manufacturing are an important part of the Turkish economy. The industry has expanded since the 1970s and by 2008 Turkey was one of the world's largest jeans exporting countries with sales of $2.3 billion.[17] It is estimated that 3 million people work in the Turkish clothing industry.[18] According to information from the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation approximately 300 000 people work in the denim industry and 10 000 -15 000 of these work with sandblasting, most of whom are young men from rural areas, or migrant workers from nearby countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Moldavia, Georgia or Azerbaijan.[19]

Turkey is the first country in which silicosis has been identified as a problem within the textile industry.[20] Since 2000 the number of workers employed as sandblasters has risen considerably. The number of silicosis cases started to increase from 2004. This enabled researchers and doctors at Atatürk University in Erzurum (north-eastern Turkey) to establish the link between jeans manufacturing and silicosis.[21]

The first two textile workers to be diagnosed with silicosis were two men aged 18 and 19 who had worked in the industry for about five years. The first had reported trouble with a dry cough, dizziness and weight loss for three months. The second had had respiratory problems for four years. The workers were 13 and 14 years old when they started at the sandblasting workshop, working eleven hours a day in a room with no windows or ventilation and with only a face mask for protection. Both men died shortly after being diagnosed.

Another study from 2008, which included 157 workers, showed that the average age of sandblasting workers was 23, and that the youngest had started working at the age of ten. The working hours and environments were described as appalling and in a number of cases the workers had slept in the workshops.[22] This meant they had suffered almost permanent exposure to silica dust throughout their employment.

By July 2010, 46 people had died from silicosis, all of whom had developed the disease whilst working within the clothing industry as sandblasters.[23] According to the Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Labourers, a Committee consisting of sandblasting workers, unions, medical practitioners and NGOs, approximately 1200 workers have been diagnosed with silicosis in Turkey in the last decade, but the Committee fears that this number could rise to almost 5000.

The fact that many of the workers are, or have been, employed within the informal sector or at unregistered companies means that they do not have any proof of employment. This means they are not eligible for social security benefits or compensation. The Solidarity Committee demands that all sandblasting workers should have the right to medical care, including a physical examination and treatment, guaranteed by the government, regardless of their social security status. Further, the Committee demands that workers who have been diagnosed with silicosis should be given the immediate right to social security and pensions, even during ongoing legal battles.[24]

In March 2009, following a campaign from the Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Labourers., the Turkish Government imposed a ban on the use of materials containing silica for the blasting denim. In addition to this the government stated that it would be closing 60 sandblasting workshops, that regulation of the remainder would improve, and that ex-sandblasting workers would be guaranteed access to pension rights. [25]



# Exporting hazardous work methods

Activists and unions in Turkey fear that the worst type of sandblasting has now been exported to other countries. At the European Textile Union Conference, held in Istanbul earlier this year, Yesim Yasin from the Solidarity Committee said that the conditions in the sandblasting industry in Bangladesh closely resembled the situation in Turkey prior to the ban.

This was confirmed in the Indian union newspaper 'The Caravan' in August 2010, which exposed conditions in a sandblasting workshop in the suburbs of Dhaka, Savar Upazila. The workers were men in their twenties and only used pieces of cloth to cover their faces. The facility had no ventilation whatsoever, and the blasting material being used was natural sand from a nearby river. The workshop employed about 30 workers, and the workshop manager interviewed claimed that there were almost a hundred similar sandblasting workshops that together blast 150 000 garments per month. As in Turkey, it is common for clothing companies to use subcontractors to do the sandblasting, which makes it difficult for the brands and retailers, or consumers, to trace the origin of the sandblasted garments.[26]

In Bangladesh, the link between sandblasting and silicosis has yet to be established. According to 'The Caravan' general practitioners, nurses and employment lawyers know too little about the risks, and it is very unlikely that poorly remunerated textile workers can afford to visit a lung specialist if they are ill.[27]

At the time of writing there is very little information about the work environments in other countries Involved in sandblasting, including China, Pakistan, Syria, Indonesia and countries in northern Africa.

*Workers in a dust-filled treatment room, Bangladesh.*

Photo © Allison Joyce 2010.

# Alternative methods

There are numerous methods that can be used to achieve a worn look on denim garments. Some involve the use of chemicals (e.g. potassium permanganate or hydrogen peroxide) whilst others make use of stone-washing, sandpaper, brushing or laser. All produce similar effects to sandblasting, including the softening of the fabric, faded patches and broken stitching. Although the most common form of sandblasting is manual blasting, sandblasting can also be performed mechanically in blasting cabinets where the process is more controlled.

The reason that manual sandblasting with natural sand has prevailed is that it is the cheapest method. Installing more advanced industrial equipment is expensive and the availability of natural sand is vast compared to other materials which don't contain the harmful silica particles. Hand-rubbing or brushing is more labour intensive and chemicals require expensive inputs. No method, however, is entirely free of risk with respect to health and safety. Heavy exposure to potassium permanganate can cause manganese poisoning and stone washing with materials other than pumice can pose a serious health hazard to workers. Using sandpaper or the brush method to achieve a worn look can put workers at risk of occupational asthma due to dust exposure. The use of laser requires considerable investments and can be dangerous if the workers fail to wear protective eye equipment.[28]

Since sandblasting and other methods of treating denim are a new phenomenon in the clothing industry it has so far been impossible to determine which method is safe from a health and safety perspective. Regardless of which method is being used, though, workshops should be suitably built and equipped. Moreover, all workers should use appropriate safety equipment, including face masks to prevent the inhalation of dangerous dust particles, goggles, ear plugs and protective clothing.

Above: Activists in Belgium stage an awareness-raising demonstration designed to bring home to shoppers the stark circumstances for workers in the sandblasting sector of the garment and textile industry. (Photo © CCC 2010)



# Opportunities for Consumer Action

Distressed denim is usually used in jeans but also in jackets,skirts and other denim items. The process of sandblasting softens the fabric and flattens the weave of the denim. It is also used to create patches of fading, often around the pockets at the back and front and around the knees. The stitches around the pockets and seams are often abraded, frayed or absent.

However, many of the other techniques create similar results and it is virtually impossible for the consumer to spot the difference between manually treated jeans and jeans that have been mechanically sandblasted, or treated using other methods. Technical expertise in jeans manufacturing is needed to be able to identify which treatment method has been used on a specific garment. It is therefore difficult for consumers to make a conscious choice between sandblasted denim and denim that has been distressed using these other, safer methods.

Many brands and retailers have now chosen to ban sandblasting from their supply chains, others have stated that sandblasting has never been used. This allows consumers to choose between those brands and retailers who are actively prohibiting sandblasting and those who may still be continuing to allow sandblasting as part of their manufacturing process. Consumers should call on those brands and retailers yet to announce such a ban to do so immediately.

This in itself, though, may still not be enough to be certain that distressed denim products are being safely produced. Even where orders are being placed using alternative methods it is possible that sandblasting is being used in unauthorised subcontracting units. This can only be avoided through the use of robust monitoring of supply chains, something that has, until now, proved difficult to achieve through standard audit mechanisms. Consumers should therefore contact retailers to ask what steps they are taking to ensure unauthorised sandblasting is kept out of their supply chain.

# The corporate response

## The role of brands and retailers in the elimination of sandblasting

Following increased media coverage of the issue in mainland Europe and dialogue and lobbying by the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF) and the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC),[29] Levi's and H&M jointly announced a ban on the use of sandblasting in September 2010. Their statement acknowledged that the monitoring of sandblasting facilities would not be sufficient to guarantee the process was being carried out safely. Since then, over 40 national and international retailers have also agreed to ban the process. Publicly announcing a ban on sandblasting is an important first step, but more needs to be done to make the elimination of manual sandblasting from the textile industry a reality.

A number of brands and retailers, who have told the CCC they are not using or will no longer use sandblasting, have yet to make this position public through their own websites or press offices. We believe that it is important for all companies to be transparent about their intentions in regard to sandblasting to enable both their customers and the workers in their supply chain to hold them accountable for their position. It is important to signal to the industry as a whole, including designers, buyers, suppliers and the fashion press that such practices are no longer acceptable. A critical mass of retailers willing to publicly outlaw the practice will also add weight to calls for national legislation on the production and importation of sandblasted products.

Some brands and retailers have announced that they intend to ban sandblasting, but that the phasing-out of the process from their supply chains will take up to 18 months. Given the acute nature of the illness this could mean that a sandblasting worker employed today could have contracted silicosis by the time the phase-out is complete. To knowingly expose any worker to such risk is unacceptable and we believe that all brands and retailers should announce an immediate prohibition on orders for sandblasted product, even if those jeans already produced may still be on sale for several months to come.

It is vital that a company ban does not simply push sandblasting even further down the supply chain into unauthorised and illegal subcontractors. Many of the brands have chosen to switch to hand rubbing or to non-silica blasting techniques, which may be carried out by the same laundry facilities that continue to offer a manual sandblasting option. If they continue to use these facilities they need to be proactive in ensuring that the technique they have asked for is actually the technique being used. They also need to learn from past mistakes and take proactive steps to establish the health risks associated with the new techniques and ensure that adequate safety protection is provided to all workers employed to carry them out. This can only be done effectively through working with local trade unions and NGOs to develop programmes with workers on the ground.

Brands and retailers must take responsibility for those workers in their supply chains that may have already been exposed to the dangers of sandblasting. The failure of the industry to properly account for the risk of using silica products in supply chains and the failure to take action when the link between silicosis and textile sandblasting became clear has made this responsibility pressing. Brands and retailers must now provide immediate health checks to all workers in their supply chain who may have been exposed to silica dust and provide information and training to those workers that continue to be employed in laundry units. Given the sudden switch from sandblasting to alternative methods there is a possibility that those workers who have been exposed to silica dust may not continue employment at the same supplier and may leave with no idea of the risks they have been exposed to. This means that these checks need to be carried out as a matter of urgency.

Finally, all those brands and retailers need to make provisions to support any affected workers to access the medical treatment they require and to support any families who may lose an income as a result of long term sickness or even death.

## Action by brands and retailers:

Below we outline the current position of a number of brands and retailers present on the UK high street. They are categorised and rated based on the criteria outlined above and based on information derived from dialogue carried out with them over the last six months.

We have divided our recommendations into 3 main elements: communication; implementation; remediation and compensation. These elements are all equally important and we expect responsible brands and retailers to be taking simultaneous steps in each. **Communication** looks at which companies have now developed and communicated their policy in regard to sandblasting. **Implementation** of the ban covers the time-scale of phase-out, the robustness of monitoring systems and the involvement of local trade unions and NGOs in this process. We also look at a further area of action: **remediation** and **compensation**. Currently no brand or retailer is taking action in this area, leaving it impossible to rate them, but we give an overview of what they should be doing and we will begin to rate in this area as the campaign develops.

### Caution!

It has not been possible to contact all of the retailers on the UK high street and this assessment only covers the largest players in the jeans market with whom an attempt to enter into dialogue has been made. More brands and retailers will be contacted over the coming months and continuing dialogue will take place with those companies mentioned here. We expect this information to change over time. Updates will be posted regularly on the Labour Behind the Label website and can be checked for the latest information.

www.labourbehindthelabel.org

# Stage 1: Communicating on the use of sandblasting

This section assesses how companies are communicating about their policy on sandblasting

## Refuse to ban or have failed to provide information on their sandblasting policy

**Armani, ASDA George, Debenhams, Dolce and Gabbana, Matalan** and **River Island** have failed to respond to our requests for information and we have been unable to find information about their use of sandblasting in the public domain. This means that consumers have no way of knowing what methods are used by these companies to create distressed denim effects, although both **ASDA George** and **River Island** continue to advertise sandblasted jeans on their website.[30] The fact that these companies have refused to engage on such a serious issues raises concerns.

## Claim that they will stop using sandblasting but have not issued a public ban on the process

**Monsoon, New Look, NEXT, Sainsbury,** and **Tesco** have all responded to say that they have been using the sandblasting process in their supply chains but that they have now immediately stopped all orders. **Marks & Spencer, Diesel, Replay** and **VF Corporation (Lee and Wrangler)** say they are planning to stop sandblasting and will switch to alternative methods over the next year (see 2b below). **Primark** have been more specific in their information: they have scaled down their sandblasting from 9 suppliers to just 3, but haven't specified when production of orders already in the pipeline will cease. So far, none of these companies have made this position public either through their websites, press offices or other public arenas although **Monsoon, NEXT** and **New Look** have told us that they intend to make this position public in 'due course.'

## Claim that sandblasting is not used in their supply chain, but have not issued a public ban

**Arcadia Group (incl. Topshop, Dorothy Perkins, Burton), Aurora Fashions (incl. Oasis, Warehouse, Karen Millen), French Connection** and **Superdry** told us that sandblasting is not used in their supply chain and that they use alternative methods to create the distressed denim effect. **French Connection** and **Superdry**



KEY: = Not even started = A long way to go. = Work still to be done. = On the right track.

simply stated that they do not use the process but have not provided any further information. **Arcadia** and **Aurora** have acknowledged the need to develop an explicit policy on the issue and are open to making their statement public, but have not yet given an indication of when this might happen. **Burberry** plan to ban but have not yet – they will put a statement on their website in April.

## Have publicly banned sandblasting

**H&M** and **Levi Strauss** were the first to issue a public statement in regard to their ban[31] in September 2010. **C&A, Benetton** and **Gucci** have also issued public statements banning sandblasting. **Pepe Jeans** issued a press release stating that they never used sandblasting in response to the launch of the campaign in Spain.

# Stage 2: Implementation of the ban on sandblasting

This section assesses how companies are putting the ban on sandblasting into place.

## No information or contradictory information provided

A ban on paper alone will not be sufficient and brands who are not developing a more robust strategy for implementation run a high risk that sandblasting may continue in their supply chain. This is true for both those companies who are stopping sandblasting and those who believe they were not using it in the first place. **French Connection, Pepe Jeans, Replay, Sainsbury,** and **Superdry** haven't told us how they plan to make sure their ban will be implemented along their supply chain. **VF Corporation** seemed highly confused about what was going on in their supply chain after first stating they would 'phase out' by 2012 and then claiming they weren't using it at all. **Marks & Spencer** gave no information at all about when they expect to switch to alternatives, just that they were investigating. **Monsoon** simply told us they would tell suppliers to refrain from using sandblasting and this would be 'vigorously' monitored but failed to provide information on what this meant. **Armani, ASDA George, Debenhams, Dolce and Gabbana, Matalan** and **River Island** have yet to ban, so gave no information.

## Have agreed to 'phase out' the use of sandblasting, but not immediately

We urge companies to take urgent action to resolve all violations reported in their supply chain. But in the case of sandblasting, where workers are at such high risk, this is even more vital. Most brands and retailers who are banning the process have now halted orders with immediate effect, proving that it can be done. A number of brands and retailers have decided, however, to 'phase out' the process instead.

**Benetton** said they would finish sandblasting by the end of 2011 and **Diesel** said the ban would take effect for orders made in Spring/Summer 2012.

It is unclear to us why alternative methods can't be used to complete an order that won't be in production for several months, especially in an industry where last minute changes are the norm. Any worker that is asked to carry out sandblasting is being put at needless risk and this is unacceptable. The long phase out times mean that even though a ban will eventually be put in place, sandblasted jeans will be retailed by these companies for some time to come.

## Monitoring and implementation of the ban to be done through inclusion in standard audits

**Arcadia, Aurora, Burberry, H&M, New Look, NEXT, Tesco** and **Levi Strauss** all stated that sandblasting would be monitored through their current audit systems. **C&A** told us that they are placing any supplier that uses sandblasting, even if not for **C&A** production, on a 'high risk' list. These suppliers will be contacted by **C&A** requesting that they stop using the process immediately. This, however, is still done as part of their routine audit assessments. Some companies, such as **Aurora, Primark** and **New Look** are doing extra work at their head offices, such as training buyers and designers.

**Primark** provided quite a detailed description of their plans, which included working to change designs of products, the hiring of a health and safety specialist in China and a formal training in Bangladesh, where worker representatives were invited, provided with information about sandblasting and given the opportunity to speak to a doctor. However, the bulk of the monitoring work is still being done by third party auditors and a commercial auditing company, Systain, whose website provides no information on their suitability and expertise in regard to health and safety in general or silicosis in particular. And, as mentioned above, production in sandblasting will continue for a while.

## Have an implementation strategy that includes local trade unions and/or NGOs

The only company that has worked with local trade union representatives and NGOs to examine the issue of sandblasting in their supply chain is **Gucci**, whose production takes place wholly in Italy. So far, none of the other brands, most of whom state they use laundries in Pakistan, Bangladesh, China and Turkey, have mentioned



including local organisations in their plans for monitoring sandblasting. To properly implement the ban, brands need to identify and collaborate with groups on the ground with expertise in worker organising, health and safety and/or medical support. This would enable workers to have direct contact with someone independent from their employers, would allow them to provide accurate information about their real working practices and give them access to appropriate support and follow up. This would be best done collaboratively amongst buyers from different brands.

Some of the brands, including **Arcadia, Aurora, Next, Tesco** and **Primark**, have met with the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation to discuss sandblasting, but none have explained how they plan to deepen this collaboration to work with trade unions on the ground.

# Stage 3: Remediation and Compensation

This section assesses what companies should be doing for those workers already exposed to the risk of silicosis. Currently no brand or retailer is taking action in this area, leaving it impossible to rate them.

In the rush to ban sandblasting it is easy to forget those workers who have already been exposed to risk. Given the rate of the illness in Turkey it seems unlikely that workers in other production countries have escaped unharmed, particularly given the lack of health and safety practice. Yet, if brands mentioned this at all it was simply to say that no case of silicosis had been reported in their supply chains. This is not surprising given that the only companies who mentioned doing medical screening simply stated that checks were done following legal guidelines and none explained how they were ensuring that these medical examinations were happening.

In order to identify silicosis victims, medical experts in occupational health need to be brought in and full screenings given to all workers. To allow a situation where workers leave their employment with no idea of what impact their job may have had on their health is unacceptable.

Details in regard to compensation need to be discussed as cases come up, but we believe that brands need to acknowledge some responsibility. If companies are already aware of the risks of sandblasting, yet continue to place orders that require this process workers will undoubtedly be placed at great risk. If companies are tempted to leave responsibility for their workers' health up to others further down the supply chain this could provide an opportunity to local suppliers to cover up potential or real cases of silicosis when they arise.

# Steps toward sandblast-free denim

The use of the deadly process of sandblasting must end now. Brands and retailers, consumers and governments all have their role to play. This is what we are calling on each of these groups to do to support the fight for a global ban on sandblasting.

## Brands and Retailers:

1. Immediately ban the use of sandblasting in their supply chains. The ban should be made public by each brand through their own websites and press offices.
2. Publicly disclose information concerning the production of sandblasted products, including production countries, names and location of suppliers providing sandblasting services and audit reports of those suppliers.
3. Make sure the ban is enforced through adequate monitoring systems that work in co-operation with local and/or factory-based trade unions and NGOs
4. Ensure that risk assessments are performed on any new production methods to prevent such devastating impacts occurring in the future.
5. Offer medical checks to workers who have been employed in their supply chains and provide compensation to workers affected by silicosis, in particular for medical treatment and loss of income.
6. Co-operate with other brands, retailers, trade unions and NGOs to work towards a global ban on the use of sandblasting in global supply chains.
7. Stop using or promoting techniques that negatively impact on workers' health; this will involve researching and taking into account such issues when designing products.

## Consumers:

1. Only buy distressed jeans from companies that have banned sandblasting.
2. Ask brands and retailers to:
   - Ban sandblasting from their jeans production.
   - Provide information on their supply chains and production methods.
   - Give medical checks to all workers at risk and provide compensation to affected workers and their families.
   - Join the campaign against sandblasting and spread the word.

## Governments:

1. Ban the use of sandblasting processes in textile production.
2. Ensure well functioning systems for monitoring compliance with health and safety legislation.
3. Provide disability pensions and medical treatment to those workers affected by silicosis.



# Notes

1 The migrant workers largely came from rural areas or nearby countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan.
2 Cappuccio, S. HesaMag #01 (2009). Jeans, the human cost of a fashion victim, p. 46, http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/newsletter/files/HESAmag_1_UK_46-47.pdf
3 Marsh, Graham & Trynka, Paul (2002). Denim from cowboys to catwalks, pp. 114-117
4 Akgun, M. et al (2008). An epidemic of silicosis among former denim sandblasters, European Respiratory Journal Volume 32 #5, p. 1302
5 Cappuccio, S. HesaMag #01 (2009) Jeans, the human cost of a fashion victim, p. 46, http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/newsletter/files/HESAmag_1_UK_46-47.pdf
6 Cappuccio, S. HesaMag #01 (2009), Jeans, the human cost of a fashion victim, p. 46, http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/newsletter/files/HESAmag_1_UK_46-47.pdf
7 Quartz is a crystalline mineral of silicon dioxide (Si02). When heated, quartz transforms into tridymite, or kristobalit. Both these minerals are modifications of crystalline silicon dioxide. (AFS 1992:16).
8 Information from the Swedish Work Environment Authority. Quartz-dust can cause silicosis.
9 Silvana Cappuccio, International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation, at the European Regional Organisation of Workers in the Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear sectors conference in Istanbul held on 29 June-1 July 2010.
10 Yesim Yasin, Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers, at the European Regional Organisation of Workers in the Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear conference in Istanbul held on 29 June-1 July 2010.
11 WHO, Concise International Chemical Assessment Document 24, Crystalline Silica, Quartz, p. 18 (2000)http://www.who.int/ipcs/publications/cicad/en/cicad24.pdf
12 Yesim Yasin, Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers, at the European Regional Organisation of Workers in the Textile, Clothing, Leather and footwear sectors conference in Istanbul held on 29 June-1 July 2010.
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15 Cappuccio, S. HesaMag #01 (2009), Jeans, the human cost of a fashion victim, p. 46, http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/newsletter/files/HESAmag_1_UK_46-47.pdf
16 Prof. Dr Zeki Kilicaslan, Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers, at the European Regional Organisation of Workers in the Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear sectors conference in Istanbul held on 29 June-1 July 2010.
17 Cappuccio, S. HesaMag #01 (2009), Jeans, the human cost of a fashion victim, p. 46, http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/newsletter/files/HESAmag_1_UK_46-47.pdf
18 Fair Wear Foundation, Annual Report (2009) p. 34. http://fairwear.org/images/2010-06/fwf_annualreport_2009.pdf
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24 The website of The Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers, http://www.kotiscileri.org
25 Cappuccio, S. HesaMag #01 (2009). Jeans, the human cost of a fashion victim, p. 46, http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/newsletter/files/HESAmag_1_UK_46-47.pdf
26 The Caravan (Indian newspaper), August 2010, http://caravanmagazine.in/PrintThisStory.aspx?StoryId=365
27 The Caravan (Indian newspaper), August 2010, http://caravanmagazine.in/PrintThisStory.aspx?StoryId=365
28 Prof. Dr Zeki Kilicaslan, Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers, via email on 15 March 2010
29 Labour Behind the Label is the UK platform of the Clean Clothes Campaign. The Fair Trade Center is an active member of the Swedish Clean Clothes Campaign.
30 http://direct.asda.com/george/men-s-clothing/sandblast-jeans/G003356425,default,pd.html and http://www.riverisland.com/Online/men/jeans/bootcut-jeans/mid-wash-denim-bootcut-jeans-244185
31 http://www.levistrauss.com/blogs/its-time-ban-sandblasting and http://www.hm.com/us/__prfinance.nhtml?pressreleaseid=511006

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