



HONG KONG: Natural leather campaign gains momentum

30 March 2011 | By: Leonie Barrie

A campaign to educate designers and consumers about the benefits of leather is gaining momentum after a steering group was set up to manage the initiative through its next stages.

The move, which was announced today (30 March) at the opening of the Materials Manufacturing & Technology (MM&T) and Fashion Access trade shows in Hong Kong, comes a year after the campaign, called LeatherNaturally, was launched at the same event.

"There is a need to protect our valuable raw material and properly educate everyone in the supply chain about this," explains consultant Mike Redwood, who is leading the campaign.

The initiative is being driven by stakeholders in the entire leather supply chain - from meat packers to tanners, manufacturers and retail brands - in response to concerns that suppliers of man-made materials are increasingly using the word 'leather' in naming their products.

Indeed, there are fears some may actually be doing so to deliberately deceive buyers into thinking that they are purchasing real leather when this is not the case.

In Brazil, under pressure from leather manufacturers, the word 'leather' may not be used when describing any man-made or synthetic material, and doing so could be a chargeable offence.

"There is a need for leather to explain itself to the supply chain and consumer," Redwood told a press conference. "It's vital that new and young consumers understand what leather is and the role it should play."

He adds: "This is not just about selling and raising prices but about repositioning and raising the value of leather. Value is defined by the final consumer, and we want to ensure we give value to the consumer and for every 23bn square feet of leather that we make."

Asia-Pacific Leather Fair (APLF), which organises the two events as well as the Prime Source Forum meeting of apparel industry executives, also has a role to play, "acting as a catalyst for information coming in and where the campaign is going," its director Michael Duck explained.

The initiative has more resonance given the continuing growth of the global leather industry. Not only is leather production on the increase in Asia, but leather prices - in line with other commodities - are rising too.

Raw material shortages after extreme weather conditions affected livestock numbers, coupled with lower meat consumption in the West which has reduced the availability of high quality finished leather, are combining with increasing demand to exacerbate the situation, industry executives say.

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