

Executive Summary

Abridged version

Dirty Laundry

The toxic secret behind global textile brands

Unravelling the toxic threads

Building upon Greenpeace's recent investigations, *Dirty Laundry* profiles the problem of toxic water pollution that results from the release of hazardous chemicals by the textile industry in China. This water pollution poses serious and immediate threats to both our precious ecosystems and to human health. Urgent and transparent action is needed in order to eliminate the use and release of these hazardous chemicals.

Leading clothing brands source many of their products from suppliers in China. Although some of these brands have Corporate Responsibility programmes which partly address the environmental impact of their supply chain, none of the brands featured in this report have an effective strategy in place to deal with the problem of water pollution caused by industrial discharges containing hazardous substances. At best, the majority of these programmes are limited to ensuring that suppliers comply with local standards – most of which rarely consider the discharge of the hazardous and persistent chemicals highlighted in this report. It is clear that these leading brands have not yet made a significant effort to tackle the problem of eliminating the release of hazardous chemicals during the production process.

Key findings of the investigations

- The investigations that form the basis of this report focus on wastewater discharges from two facilities in China. The first facility, the Youngor Textile Complex, is located on the Yangtze River Delta. The second, Well Dyeing Factory Limited, is located on a tributary of the Pearl River Delta. Additional investigations into the supply chains that tie these facilities to national and international

brands were also undertaken. **The results from these samples are indicative of a much wider problem.**

- The scientific analysis of the samples found that both manufacturing facilities were discharging a range of hazardous chemicals into the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas. Significantly, **hazardous and persistent chemicals with hormone-disrupting properties were found in the samples.** Alkylphenols (including nonylphenol) were found in wastewater samples from both facilities, and perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs), in particular perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulphonate (PFOS), were present in the wastewater from the Youngor Textile Complex. This was **despite the presence of a modern wastewater treatment plant** at the Youngor facility. The alkylphenols and PFCs found in the samples are a cause for serious concern, as these chemicals are known hormone disruptors and can be hazardous even at very low levels. Many of the substances within these groups are regulated in the Global North, for example by the EU or by international conventions.
- Our investigations further revealed that the companies behind the two facilities have commercial relationships (as suppliers) with a range of major brands, including **Abercrombie & Fitch, Adidas, Bauer Hockey, Calvin Klein, Converse, Cortefiel, H&M, Lacoste, Li Ning, Meters/bonwe, Nike, Phillips-Van Heusen Corporation (PVH Corp), Puma and Youngor**, and have also been linked with a number of other Chinese and international brands. When confirming their commercial relationship with the Youngor Group, Bauer Hockey, Converse, Cortefiel, H&M, Nike and Puma informed Greenpeace that they make no use of the wet processes of the Youngor Group for the production of their garments.

However, regardless of what the aforementioned brands use these facilities for, none of these brands have in place comprehensive chemicals management policies

that would allow them to have a complete overview of the hazardous chemicals used and released across their entire supply chain and to act on this information. As brand owners, they are in the best position to influence the environmental impacts of production and to work together with their suppliers to eliminate the releases of all hazardous chemicals from the production process and their products. These brands need to take responsibility for the use and release of persistent, hormone-disrupting chemicals into our critical and life-sustaining waterways. A commitment to **zero discharge** of hazardous chemicals along with a plan on how to achieve this is urgently needed in order to prevent the further accumulation of hazardous substances in the aquatic environment, and the resulting build-up in people and wildlife.

Championing a better future

Toxic pollution has to be dealt with in all countries.

Hazardous, persistent and hormone-disrupting chemicals continue to be used and released, contaminating our waterways and threatening our livelihoods and our future. As influential actors implicated as part of a broken system, brands and governments have a responsibility to act now.

The role of brands:

To this end, Greenpeace is calling on the brands and their suppliers identified in this investigation to become the **champions for a post-toxic world** – by eliminating all releases of hazardous chemicals from their supply chains and their products.

Specifically, this entails establishing clear company and supplier policies that commit their entire supply chain to the shift from hazardous to safer chemicals, accompanied by a plan of action that is matched with clear and realistic timelines.

Proper policies to eliminate the use and release of all hazardous chemicals across a company's entire supply chain should be based on a precautionary approach to chemicals management, and account for the whole product lifecycle and releases from all pathways. To be credible, these policies need to be accompanied by a plan of implementation, with clear timelines, and be matched with real and substantial action on the ground. Furthermore, steps such as knowing what hazardous chemicals their suppliers use and release, being transparent and accountable by making this data publicly available, and prioritizing 'known' hazardous chemicals for immediate elimination will be fundamental to their shift towards championing a toxic-free future.

Above all these companies need to act as leaders and innovators. The problems associated with the use and release of hazardous chemicals within the textile industry

will not be fixed by severing ties with one or two polluting suppliers. The solutions are to be found in working together with suppliers to bring about systematic change in the way brands and businesses create their products. Such action requires vision, commitment and a desire to improve upon the current approach to hazardous chemicals. Every brand and supplier has the responsibility to know when and where hazardous chemicals are being used and released up and down their supply chain and to strive to eliminate them. **It will therefore be through their actions, not their words, that these brands can become agents of positive change.**

The role of governments:

Greenpeace is calling on governments to adopt a political commitment to '**zero discharge**' of all hazardous chemicals within one generation, based on the **precautionary principle** and a **preventative approach** to chemicals management.

This commitment must be matched with an implementation plan containing intermediate short term targets, a dynamic list of priority hazardous substances requiring immediate action, and a publicly available register of data on discharge emissions and losses of hazardous substances, such as a Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR). These steps must be taken to prevent further damage to the environment and risks to health from future uses and releases of hazardous and persistent chemicals, and to avert the need for costly clean-up operations.

Governments have a choice. They can continue to expose their citizens and the environment to hazardous toxic pollution, and condemn future generations to pay for the management of contaminated sediments, whose full and final costs are incalculable. Or they can commit to creating a post-toxic world, by taking precautionary action to support truly sustainable innovation, and progressively reduce the use and release of hazardous substances **down to zero.**

The role of global citizens:

As global citizens, our power to stand up for what we believe in and to collectively influence brands and governments to make the right choices for us and future generations has never been greater than it is today.

Please join with us and support Greenpeace in calling on these brands to **champion a post-toxic world** – where our water supplies are no longer polluted with hazardous, persistent and hormone-disrupting chemicals by industry.

Together we can demand that they act NOW to detox our rivers, detox our planet and ultimately, detox our future. A post-toxic world is not only desirable, it's possible.

Together we can help create it.

www.greenpeace.org/detox