

Leather Goods and Footwear

Sustainability Insights



Product Description

Leather Goods and Footwear include goods and footwear made primarily of leather materials, including full-grain, corrected-grain, patent, bonded, and split types of leather, and suede. Product types include jackets, pants, bags, cases, gloves, holsters, vests, chaps, leather footwear, watch straps, satchels, totes, and wallets.

Mission

The mission of The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) is to improve the sustainability of products when they are made, purchased, and used, with a focus on manufacturers and the retail buyers who decide what products to carry in stores. The information in this document is drawn from our detailed research on known and potential social and environmental impacts across product life cycles. TSC acknowledges that other issues exist, but we have included here those that are most relevant to the decision making of retail buying teams and manufacturers. The topics are listed alphabetically for ease of reading; the order does not represent prioritization or other criteria.

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Animals

Animal welfare

Leather goods and footwear manufacturers should engage with leather material suppliers who source hides from cattle operations with comprehensive management plans, including certification programs, that ensure animal welfare. Plans or programs should include practices that avoid painful procedures; ensure access to adequate housing and proper nutrition; require proper handling, proper transportation, and humane slaughter methods; and promote good health in ways that are appropriate for cattle.



Managing the Supply Chain

Supply chain transparency

Addressing many of the environmental and social challenges within a leather supply chain requires cooperation among companies at different stages of the supply chain. Chain-of-custody and other data-sharing systems and initiatives can help improve transparency about where materials are being sourced, and manufacturers and suppliers can work together to address common issues, such as energy, water, chemicals, worker health and safety, and labor rights.



Use of Resources

Climate and energy

Processing of leather materials and manufacturing leather goods and footwear, including tanning and other chemical processes, can consume significant amounts of energy and electricity. Manufacturers can help abate these impacts by measuring, tracking, and reporting energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, with a focus on reduction. They can also perform preventative maintenance on equipment, replace inefficient equipment, use renewable energy, and encourage efficient energy behaviors throughout their operations.

Material efficiency

Manufacturers can help minimize the environmental impacts of leather material sourcing and production by designing products that use less resource-intensive materials, are optimized for weight or volume, are durable, or are recyclable. Take-back programs and reusing materials from the manufacturing processes can improve material efficiency.

Pollution

Chemicals used in treating and tanning leather materials can escape manufacturing facilities and cause water pollution, posing risks to the surrounding community. Manufacturers should implement a chemical management system to identify and control potential risks, use processes that minimize the amount of required chemicals, and use technology to treat and measure the quality of water they release from their factories.



Workers and Communities

Forced or Child Labor

Forced and child labor are global issues being addressed by businesses and organizations worldwide. In some areas, there is a risk of forced or child labor, characterized by actions such as trafficking, withholding wages or documents, and restricting workers to the work site. Manufacturers should implement codes of conduct for their suppliers, audit facilities across their supply chain, and publicly report their performance, to help ensure that there is no use of forced or child labor.

Workers

Workers may be exposed to hazards and, in some parts of the world, their rights to freedom of association, equal opportunity and treatment, and fair wages may not be protected. To help ensure worker health, safety, and labor rights, final product manufacturers should have a documented health and safety management plan, including a chemical management plan where needed, and provide safety training and personal protective equipment to workers. Manufacturers should procure materials from suppliers that address worker health and safety and labor rights transparently and should perform audits when needed.