U. of Georgia's Research Questions the Performance Qualities of Bamboo Fiber

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water and air. Since the pulp from any plant or tree, including bamboo, can be used as the cellulose source for rayon production, the resulting fiber that is created is still rayon and should be labeled as such.

Dr. Hardin's team conducted their testing on seven bamboo sample fabrics that were purchased over the Internet from a variety of sources. The bamboo fibers were extracted from each of the seven samples, and cross-sections were prepared and examined by optical microscopy and scanning electron microscopy. The cross-sections were then compared to those of rayon. The sample fibers were also tested for antimicrobial activity using AATCC Test Method 147.

During the investigation, the team discovered that the majority of the tested fabrics contained bamboo fiber that was produced in China by the China Bambo Textile Company. Hardin explained that this company made false claims, sometimes attributing the fabric's performance and sustainable qualities to those of bamboo, when the fabric was actually rayon.

Hardin explained, "Each of the manufacturers claimed that the bamboo fabrics used in their products had antimicrobial properties, the ability to evaporate sweat quickly, never sticking to the skin in hot weather, ultraviolet radiation protection, and protection in a green process without any pollution. Typically, their advertisements insisted that bamboo was the most environmentally-friendly fiber available."

As a result of the work done by the University of Georgia, the marketing of bamboo has already begun to change. On August 11, 2009, in a press release entitled, "FTC Charges Companies with 'Bamboo-izing' Consumers with False Product Claims," the FTC announced these deceptive environmental claims. The agency's intention is to make sure that consumers are protected from all deceptive claims in the labeling and advertising of bamboo textile products.

Hardin noted, "I now see labels reading 'rayon from bamboo,' but I still see claims being made regarding antimicrobial properties, and that is bigger! While anyone can import these fibers, companies must label them as rayon. There is a true bamboo fiber that can be produced directly from the plant (as opposed to the pulpess process used for rayon), but it is stiff and would not have the comfort properties you would want unless you treated it extensively, either mechanically or chemically, to soften it up, similar to that of jute and cane."

For more information on the testing of bamboo as a performance fiber, contact Ian Hardin, the University of Georgia, 706-542-9357, ihardin@fcs.uga.edu

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