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James&Co Brand Leads Actions For More Sustainable Synthetic Leather Fabrics In Fashion

No more toxic traditional polyurethane (PU) fabric for the brand's sustainable outerwear and accessories

PU is the synthetic leather fabric which has been the common fabric for faux or vegan leather as the alternative to real leather. It is now well-known that PU contains the hazardous chemical Dimethylformaldehyde or DMF which is harmful to workers who come in contact with it. Additionally the manufacturing process for PU emits high levels of green house gases and has harmful environmental, health and safety impacts.

Therefore while PU was a welcome animal-friendly alternative to real leather, information and action over recent years about the negative impacts of PU for the environment and workers' health and safety has generated a growth of innovative developments for lab-grown and plant-based more sustainable alternatives to PU.

Regulatory and industry actions are on the case for eradicating DMF from fabrics, and hence eradicating PU. DMF is listed as a Substance Of Very High Concern with European regulator REACH. Industry body ZDHC (Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals) has DMF on its Manufacturers Restricted Substance List and stipulates that the deliberate use of DMF should be avoided and alternative more sustainable fabrics for faux leather should be used.

Recent research by the UN as part of its Sustainable Development Goals initiative reported that 96% of people feel their own personal actions, such as donating, recycling or buying ethically, can make a difference to helping make the world a better place. And that 88% of consumers expect brands to help them make a difference.

James&Co is the niche brand for womens' outerwear and accessories tailored in vegan leather since 2012. Following all developments closely about the use of PU and the demands for sustainability, the brand is now the fashion industry leader which has ditched PU for the manufacture of its outerwear and accessories and put the purpose of sustainable synthetic leather fabrics front and center of its mission.

The more sustainable fabrics used by James&Co include the lab-grown eco vegan leather. Commonly called 'water based pu', it is made without the chemical DMF and its manufacturing process has less negative EHS impacts as it is lighter on the use of water and emission of CO2. It is a quality soft and water-resistant fabric and available in degrees of grainy finish and colours.

Plant-based Pinatex pineapple leaf leather is woven from the long fibres in pineapple leaves and is available for James&Co outerwear and accessories. The new innovative cactus vegan leather is made from the leaves of cactus plants and James&Co is the leading brand to use it for its outerwear.

For further confirmation that James&Co is leading fashion industry actions to end the use of PU in favour of more sustainable synthetic leather fabrics, the brand has recently been announced as a bluesign® SYSTEM PARTNER. This partnership recognises that James&Co will work with the suppliers of our synthetic leather fabrics to ensure the fabrics contain no chemicals hazardous to the environment and people and the method of manufacture has minimal damaging impact on the environment, and the health and safety of workers.

James&Co is the first bluesign® SYSTEM PARTNER globally for synthetic leather fabrics and the first brand ever in Australia.

Founder and CEO of James&Co, Anne Hurley, said that:

‘A retail partnership with the James&Co brand for more sustainable vegan leather products instead of PU-manufactured products will make a contribution to the ultimate phasing out of toxic PU and the reduction of toxic waste from the supply chain. It will enable retailers to meet their sustainable goals of eradicating harmful raw materials from their products, as well as responding to the consumer demand for sustainable and responsibly-sourced products.’

James&Co is headquartered in Australia but supplies globally.

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