



**OEKO-TEX®**  
INSPIRING CONFIDENCE



# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS





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## STeP by OEKO-TEX®

Today's consumers want high-quality textiles that are harmless to their health and made in facilities which are environmentally friendly and socially responsible. With our STeP by OEKO-TEX® certification we offer targeted support for brands, retailers and manufacturers who successfully meet the challenge of sustainable production requirements. This system enables companies to publicly document their commitment to sustainable initiatives along the entire textile chain in a clear and transparent way. With this brochure, we hope to give you an overview of the STeP by OEKO-TEX® (STeP stands for 'Sustainable Textile Production') certification by asking and answering the most important questions. Our worldwide

member institutes and contact offices will be happy to provide you with more information ([www.oeko-tex.com](http://www.oeko-tex.com)).



**Georg Dieners**

Secretary General | OEKO-TEX® Association

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## » What is STeP by OEKO-TEX®? «

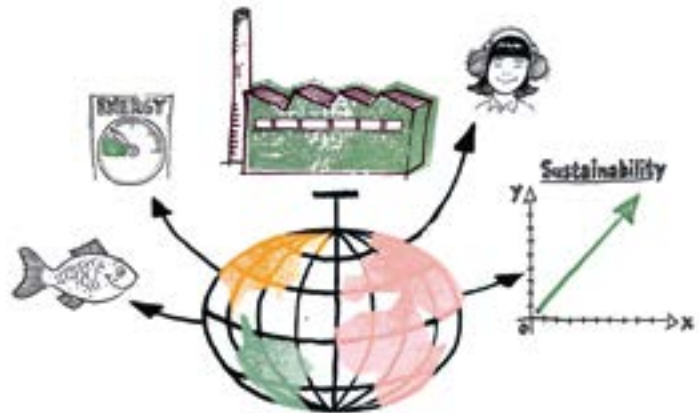
Sustainable Textile Production (STeP) is an independent certification system for brands, retail companies and manufacturers within the textile chain who want to communicate their path towards more sustainable production conditions to the public in a transparent and credible manner. The modular structure of the STeP certification allows comprehensive analysis and evaluation of all relevant corporate areas regarding the use of environmentally friendly technologies and products, efficient use of resources as well as compliance with social working conditions. In addition to the comprehensive STeP certification, an internal STeP assessment provides the opportunity for an initial sustainability evaluation.

**STeP certification.** The classic, complete certification process includes a Web-based assessment, the validation of the data provided by the applicant, and an on-site audit. At the end of the process, the evaluated company receives a STeP certificate and a qualified OEKO-TEX® audit report. Use of the certificate is subject to the rules of the audit and its conditions.

**Internal STeP assessment.** In the framework of the assessment tool, OEKO-TEX® offers the option to use it for internal purposes and to have it validated by a qualified OEKO-TEX® expert. The result is an OEKO-TEX® assessment with a qualified report. It may only be used for internal communication and as a basis for improvement processes. The internal assessment cannot replace the full certification process.

## » What is the objective of STeP? «

The objective of the STeP certification is the permanent implementation of environmentally friendly production processes and safe and socially acceptable working conditions in production facilities along the textile chain. Regular updates of the STeP criteria allow certified companies to continuously improve their environmental performance and social responsibility as well as their efficiency. This in turn enables them to achieve the best possible competitive position on the market.



## » What are the advantages of STeP? «

STeP allows globally operating brands and retail companies to search for suitable suppliers worldwide who meet their demands regarding environmental protection and social responsibility. This enables brands and retail companies to provide clear and complete documentation of their joint sustainable commitment to consumers together with the supply chain.

Textile and clothing manufacturers can make their production processes much more efficient using STeP certification. The independent verification allows the companies to show their engagement in sustainable production conditions, to open up new markets and supplier relations.

Other existing certifications largely take into account only individual aspects of sustainability such as quality management, carbon footprint or use of renewable raw materials. STeP, on the other hand, allows comprehensive analysis and assessment with regard to sustainable production conditions. In addition, the STeP certification is specifically adapted to the situation in the textile and clothing industry.



## » Which manufacturing processes along the textile value chain are covered by the STeP certification? «

STeP by OEKO-TEX® addresses facility performance across the entire textile production chain, including:

- › Dry spinning, twisting and related processes
- › Wet spinning and related processes
- › Weaving, knitting, production of non-wovens and related processes
- › Dyeing, printing, finishing, coating and related processes
- › Making up of products through cutting, sewing and related processes
- › Manufacturing of accessories (e.g. zips, buttons, labels)
- › Manufacturing of foams and mattresses
- › Textile logistics for textiles and its accessories only
- › Other (e.g. non-agricultural fibre production)

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## » In what way is the STeP certification modular? «

Starting with the concept of a comprehensive analysis and assessment of sustainable production conditions, STeP takes into account production steps and requirements in the textile chain.

### These include:

- › Chemical management
- › Environmental performance
- › Environmental management
- › Social responsibility
- › Quality management
- › Health and safety



## » Why does the STeP certification include a scoring system? «

The objective of the STeP certification is the lasting and continuous improvement of working and production conditions with regard to sustainability. The assessment of environmental performance and social responsibility of production facilities on the basis of a scoring system is an expression of this dynamic process. The companies can use the results of the STeP certification to evaluate sustainability in the different areas, making them the starting point for continuous improvement.

At the same time, the scoring system provides more transparency by allowing comparability for the sustainability activities and measures of production facilities at all relevant company levels. This is a great advantage, particularly for international brands and retail companies, who are looking for suitable suppliers and want to provide consumers with transparent and traceable documentation of their commitment to sustainable production conditions.

## » Which levels comprise the scoring system? «

The STeP scoring system comprises three different levels in order to evaluate the measures and activities of the companies which have applied for certification with regard to sustainable production conditions, depending on the extent achieved:

**Level 1** = Compliance with the entry level

**Level 2** = Good implementation with further optimisation potential

**Level 3** = Exemplary implementation in the sense of a best-practice example

The six STeP core modules – chemical management, environmental performance, environmental management, social responsibility, quality management and health and safety – are individually evaluated during the STeP certification on the basis of this scoring. The overall scoring for a production facility then results from the average of all module scores.

# STeP SCORING



## » What are the arguments in favour of STeP when compared to other certifications for sustainable production conditions? «

- › **Independent:** All OEKO-TEX® institutes are internationally recognised, neutral organisations accredited as independent test and research institutes. With STeP by OEKO-TEX®, these institutes offer a globally standardised solution for more sustainability in the entire textile industry.
- › **Textiles:** In contrast to some other systems, the STeP certification is especially adapted to the situation in the textile industry, providing a sound assessment of the sustainable production conditions. The OEKO-TEX® institutes have wide-ranging know-how across all processing stages and therefore the required competence for providing realistic company assessments.
- › **Transparent:** STeP offers maximum transparency on all levels and for all stakeholders – all criteria and evaluation methods are publically accessible. The certified companies have full access to their data and their assessment details. The assessment system provides a condensed yet comprehensible representation of the sustainability performance for manufacturers, brands, retailers and even consumers.

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- › **Comprehensive:** Production facilities are examined as a whole under the aspects of the different individual components of the STeP certification.
  - › **Dynamic:** The continuous development of STeP certification criteria supports the ongoing improvement process of the certified companies, increasing awareness for sustainable working and production conditions within the textile industry.
  - › **Communicative:** The STeP certification provides a credible and comprehensive form of communication for customers and media. The internationally accepted OEKO-TEX® brand reinforces the outside impact for actively participating companies.



## » In what way is STeP a dynamic certification system? «

The objective of the STeP certification is not a one-off process that ends when the certificate is issued. It is rather a continuous optimisation process towards sustainable working and production conditions. The dynamic and continuous optimisation process therefore makes up the basic concept of STeP. In this context, the use of the best available technologies (BAT) and the consistent development of the company's own inventions are important factors for the implementation of the more sustainability in everyday production. Also, international standards such as in the environmental or social sector are subject to continuing change.

Accordingly, the criteria for STeP certification are updated annually by the OEKO-TEX® Association and dynamically adapted in line with current requirements, new scientific findings and legal stipulations. The certificate is valid for three years. The required extension of STeP certification supports the participating companies in their ongoing development process in the field of sustainability.



## » To what extent is STeP transparent? «

In addition to general information about the process and the cost of a STeP certification, the criteria, procedures and calculation methods for the performance assessment of the production facilities are publically communicated in the official documents of the STeP certification and as part of the assessment tool. They are also available through the OEKO-TEX® website.

The assessment tool allows certified companies to review sustainability scoring for their individual company areas as well as how their overall score has been calculated. At the same time, companies can use these evaluations to identify individual areas for optimisation.

STeP-certified production facilities can pass on details about their certification (e.g. audit results, individual evaluations for specific aspects etc.) at the request of customers, such as brands or retail companies. The OEKO-TEX® Association itself, however, will publish these details only at the express request of the certified companies.

## » Are the STeP criteria the same all over the world? «

Yes. Due to the globally interlinked textile and clothing industry, only globally binding criteria make sense when it comes to the objective comparability of sustainable production conditions. The international OEKO-TEX® Association ensures the standardised application of and compliance with the criteria through an extensive quality management system.





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## » Who can obtain STeP certification? «

Any production facility in the textile chain, from spinning mills, manufacturers of textile fabrics and textile finishing facilities to manufacturers of ready-made articles, producers of foams and mattresses as well as suppliers of textile accessories can have their production and working conditions certified in line with STeP. Certification of individual areas of multistage production facilities (e.g. only finishing) is also possible, as long as the area concerned can be clearly separated from other areas. Agricultural processes such as the cultivation of cotton or the production of sheep wool as well as post-production stages such as transport currently cannot be certified by STeP.



## » Which individual steps are included in the STeP certification? «

- › Interested companies use the online STeP application form on the OEKO-TEX® website and agree to the terms of use.
- › The chosen OEKO-TEX® institute provides the company with the access data for the assessment tool.
- › The company completes the online assessment tool.
- › The data is analysed and evaluated by the assigned OEKO-TEX® institute.
- › An auditor from the OEKO-TEX® institute visits the production facility and verifies the information provided in the online assessment tool.
- › The assigned OEKO-TEX® institute creates a detailed STeP Audit report and – if the required criteria have been met – OEKO-TEX® issues a STeP certificate to the requesting company.
- › After receiving the certificate the company is entitled to communicate its STeP certification to the public and to also use it commercially. This particularly includes the right to pass on their own sustainability performance (scoring) to third parties.



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## » What are the costs for certification? «

The costs for STeP certification depend on the size of the company, the test criteria specific to each production stage as well as the extent to which the company has already implemented measures regarding environmental protection and social responsibility.

The certification fee is EUR 3,000 (excl. VAT). Additional costs are the man-days for the support during application, the evaluation of the assessment, the preparation, execution and documentation of the audit, the issuing of the certificate and the travel expenses for the auditors.

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## » Who carries out the STeP certification? «

The responsibility for the STeP certification lies with the International OEKO-TEX® Association and its 18 member institutes. The desired OEKO-TEX® institute can be selected when filling out the STeP application form. Institute employees and auditors support the customer throughout the whole STeP certification process. The OEKO-TEX® auditors visit the production facility and verify the information provided in the electronic questionnaire.

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## » How long is a STeP certificate valid? «

The STeP certificate, issued after successful auditing of the production facility, is valid for 3 years and can be extended for an incremental period of 3 years after successful recertification. If any problems are discovered, whether it be during a compliance audit or otherwise, the STeP by OEKO-TEX® certificate can be withdrawn under special circumstances.

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## » How much time should be planned for STeP certification? «

An average period of at least three months can be assumed from the time of application, data collection and data assessment to the audit and the issuing of the certificate. The actual period of time, however, crucially depends on how long the facility will take to answer the assessment questionnaire.

Additionally, the duration of the actual certification process still depends on many factors, primarily the individual circumstances in each production facility – for example whether any certifications or compliance systems, such as ISO 14001, SA 8000 or BSCI exist for individual company areas or how fast the required data can be determined and provided for the assessment.

## » What types of audits are carried out during the STeP by OEKO-TEX® certification process? «

In addition to the routine audits during the initial certification, OEKO-TEX® carries out compliance audits during the validity of the certificate, as well as unannounced audits. The responsible OEKO-TEX® institute verifies and ensures compliance with the required STeP criteria in the production facilities on site.

Further information about the different types of audits can be found in the STeP by OEKO-TEX® Standard.





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» **Do fully integrated production facilities in one location always have to have the entire company certified or can certain production lines be certified individually? «**

As far as individual production areas are concerned, for example yarn spinning which is clearly separated from other areas such as weaving, finishing or clothing production, yes, they can be individually STeP-certified in special cases and after consultation with OEKO-TEX®.

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» **Can individual company areas, which are relevant to the assessment of sustainability, be STeP-certified – for example only health and safety? «**

No. The concept of the STeP certification includes a comprehensive consideration of sustainable production conditions. This is why the performance evaluation always includes all six relevant company areas (see question 5). Within the individual modules, however, each area is assessed individually. This allows third parties to obtain transparent information about the individual performance of a company in each of the modules.

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## » Is it possible for a company with two production facilities to have only one STeP certificate for both facilities? «

If both facilities have the same administration and all units belong to the same company (legal entity), they can be certified like one production facility. The STeP modules (e.g. Quality Management or Environmental Management) have to be operated in the same manner in both units. Areas that are specific to a facility must always be assessed and audited separately.

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## » Can a STeP certification be upgraded? «

Yes. To do this, the improvements achieved by the company in each of the areas are analysed and evaluated in the framework of the assessment tool. If the production facility obtains better values than with the previous assessment and if these are confirmed by a new audit, the company will receive an improved scoring. For a revaluation during the validity of a certificate, the company will have to bear the actual costs involved.

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## » What proof do companies receive for the STeP certification? «

Each company receives a detailed final report from the OEKO-TEX® Association, including the analysis from the assessment tool and the documentation of the audit results. A STeP certificate is also issued, which is accepted as legally binding proof of valid certification by other businesses.



## » What type of information can customers or competitors obtain about existing STeP certifications of production facilities? «

The information authority lies exclusively with the certified company. If the company/production facility wants to grant third parties access to the information this can be done via the OEKO-TEX® Web platform. Passing certification details on to interested customers is also fully at the discretion of the holder of the STeP certificate.

However, it is customary for brands, retail customers or buyers to request their suppliers' STeP certificates for comparison during selection and qualification of supplier companies.

(OEKO-TEX® and the OEKO-TEX® institutes will only pass on results and details of the certification to third parties with the express consent of the company.)

## » Why does STeP distinguish between environmental performance and environmental management? «

In the area of environmental performance, STeP certification allows measurable environmental impact to be analysed and assessed. Specific measures, which are needed to achieve optimisation of the environmental performance, are stipulated for each production stage.

In addition to the individual measures carried out for more environmental protection, STeP also requires the establishment of an environmental management system (EMS) to ensure targeted coordination and systematic implementation of all environmental targets and measures. These include, for example, laying down the company's own environmental policy, appointing environmental representatives and providing regular employee training.

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» **Are other company certifications such as ISO 9001, ISO 14001, SA 8000 or OHSAS 18001/ ISO 45001 recognised in the framework of a STeP certification? «**

Yes, other company certifications that actively support sustainability efforts within your company are an excellent starting point for a STeP certification and can be integrated without any problems.

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» **What synergies do such already existing certifications offer with regard to STeP? «**

Existing company certifications can have a positive effect on the overall assessment in the framework of the STeP certification. In many cases this allows a reduction of the costs for the assessment and the subsequent company audit because areas already covered by a third-party certificate will only be subject to random checks during the STeP audit.

If a company already has a QM-certification according to ISO 9001 or an EMS-certification in line with ISO 14001, there will be practically no additional costs involved in these areas. On the other hand, production facilities with a STeP certification can do without these two additional certificates, because they already meet the requirements regarding an adequate quality management and environmental management system through their STeP certificate.

## » Our company is already certified to ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or OHSAS 18001/ISO 45001. Is a STeP certification still worthwhile? «

Yes. The listed certificates only examine one specific area of production, such as quality management, environmental management or health and safety.

STeP by OEKO-TEX® on the other hand is an integrated certification system, which includes all company areas, offering the company a comprehensive assessment of the working and production conditions with regard to sustainability.

This system allows certified companies maximum transparency regarding their level of sustainability already achieved and provides their business partners with the desired safety.



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## » Are initiatives, such as BSCI, Fair Wear Foundation or WRAP, accepted by the STeP certification? «

Initiatives, such as BSCI, Fair Wear Foundation or WRAP, are accepted third-party compliance systems when relevant to the social responsibility. These references allow customers to show their engagement with regard to the ambitious STeP requirements and targets.

Third-party certifications and systems accepted by STeP by OEKO-TEX® are described in the Annex of the STeP Standard.



## » Can STeP-certified companies label their products with the STeP logo? «

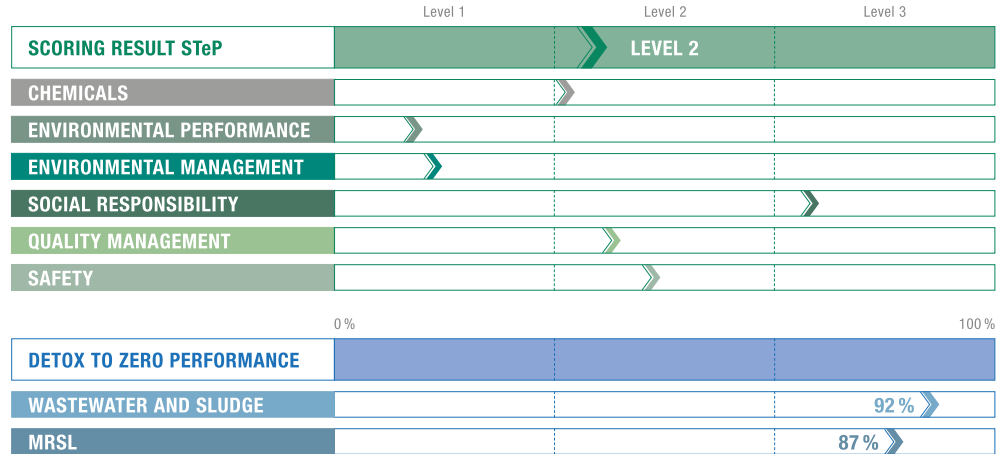
No. The STeP by OEKO-TEX® label with your individual certificate number must not be used for product labelling. According to our terms of use, you are only allowed to use the STeP label for B2B communication.

The OEKO-TEX® Association has two product labels which may be used if criteria are met. If products have been tested in line with the criteria of STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX® and therefore have been proven to meet STANDARD 100's strict limit values for harmful substances, the items can be labelled with STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX®, because there are no harmful levels of these substances left in the products. Or, if your products are certified according to STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX® and manufactured according to OEKO-TEX® guidelines in STeP-certified facilities, the MADE IN GREEN consumer label is available (see [www.madeingreen.com](http://www.madeingreen.com) for more details); this label can be issued for all stages of textile production.

## » What is the relation between DETOX TO ZERO by OEKO-TEX® and the STeP certification? «

Companies have the option to integrate DETOX TO ZERO by OEKO-TEX® into their STeP certification. The results of the DETOX TO ZERO assessment will be included in the final STeP report and in the STeP certificate.

We highly recommend to include the analysis and evaluation of chemical management, waste water and sludge in the STeP certification. Additional information about DETOX TO ZERO by OEKO-TEX® can be found on our website.



## » How is DETOX TO ZERO by OEKO-TEX® integrated into STeP certification? «

- › Choose option A: STeP certification including DETOX TO ZERO assessment when answering question 3 “We are interested in:” of the online STeP application form.
- › Submit a valid test report for waste water and, if applicable, for sludge. The conformity of the report regarding the STeP and DETOX TO ZERO by OEKO-TEX® criteria will be checked during the STeP certification process.
- › The STeP certificate is valid for 3 years. However, an annual waste water and sludge analysis must be carried out to retain the STeP certification with DETOX TO ZERO rating. The expenses for these yearly analyses are not covered in the initial STeP certification fee.
- › Additional costs will apply for the data validation and on-site inspections required for the DETOX TO ZERO assessment.

## » What impact does the production of an STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX® certificate have on the STeP certification? «

STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX® is a testing and certification system exclusively relating to textile items of all production stages and used accessory materials where the company quality management ensures that the materials used are traceable at any time. STeP requires a system that ensures compliance with the buyer's requirements and the legal regulations of the consumer market. The reproducibility of product quality according to STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX® and the company quality management can therefore be included in the requirements for the STeP quality management system and be assessed as well.

After all, some of the required human ecology criteria can only be achieved if certain chemicals in the production process are excluded or strictly regulated – for example the use of formaldehyde or alkylphenol ethoxylates.

With this in mind, a product certification according to STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX® can have a positive influence on the evaluation of the use of chemicals in the framework of the STeP certification under certain circumstances.

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**» If companies have their products STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX®-certified, will they benefit from a STeP certification with regard to the necessary audits? «**

Companies that are both STeP-certified and have their products certified with STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX® will not have to bear the costs for the mandatory STANDARD 100 quality management audit. Additionally, the STANDARD 100 audit (every three years) will be carried out within the framework of one of the STeP audits.

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## » How does OEKO-TEX® ensure a globally standardised level for the audits and assessments? «

The creation and the continuous development of the STeP criteria as well as the execution of the company audits are based on the long-standing experience and the wide-ranging textile expertise of the OEKO-TEX® member institutes.

As a global full service provider with regard to products that are safe in terms of human ecology, chemical management and a sustainable textile production, the OEKO-TEX® Association has 25 years of experience with the certification of products and production facilities within the entire textile value chain. The extensive internal quality management of the OEKO-TEX® institutes ensures globally standardised test results including joint training courses to ensure ongoing education of the auditors, for example. Annual meetings of the technical specialist groups also allow a continuous internal further development process.

The institutes and contact offices in over 60 countries worldwide provide the OEKO-TEX® Association with great knowledge of the regional situation in all countries relevant to textile production. They can support and advise companies interested in STeP certification locally and in their mother tongue.

## About OEKO-TEX®

With 25 years of experience, OEKO-TEX® leads the world in empowering and enabling consumers and companies to protect our planet by making responsible decisions. OEKO-TEX® provides standardised solutions which optimise customers' manufacturing processes and help deliver high quality, more sustainable products. All of the products within the OEKO-TEX® portfolio are used to strengthen our customers' systems, processes or products and, ultimately, they help create more sustainable companies. To date, more than 10,000 manufacturers, brands, and retailers in almost 100 countries are working with OEKO-TEX® to ensure that their products are tested for potentially harmful substances and millions of consumers around the world look for OEKO-TEX® labels before making buying decisions. OEKO-TEX® certified products and suppliers can be located in the OEKO-TEX® Online Buying Guide at [www.oeko-tex.com](http://www.oeko-tex.com). Connect with OEKO-TEX® on [Facebook](#), on [LinkedIn](#), and on [Twitter](#).

### Published by

OEKO-TEX® Association  
Genferstrasse 23  
P.O. Box 2006 | CH-8027 Zurich  
[info@oeko-tex.com](mailto:info@oeko-tex.com)  
[www.oeko-tex.com](http://www.oeko-tex.com)



**Centexbel OEKO-TEX®  
Team**  
Technologiepark 70  
BE 9052 Zwijnaarde  
oekotex@centexbel.be  
www.centexbel.be  
www.oeko-tex.com

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