

Purchasing apparel ethically

Provided by the Brandeis Labor Coalition
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We are surrounded by clothing made by workers in unsafe conditions who struggle daily to provide food and shelter for their families. The Brandeis Labor Coalition is working to eliminate sweatshop made apparel on our campus. You can help by ensuring that your club or organization commits to buying only sweat-free apparel. Every purchase of sweat-free clothing ensures that ethical, responsible factories stay in business. As a campus we can live out our university's commitment to social action by promising to buy our clothing in a way that supports workers' rights and global justice.

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For more information on sweatshop-free and ethical purchasing,
or if you'd like a friendly voice to aid you in
*explaining the benefits of sweat-free to a club
*reviewing purchasing options
*opening contact with a clothing supplier

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What makes a workplace Sweat-free?

Based on model policy developed by the UNITE union and adopted in New Jersey and Milwaukee.

Fundamental International Labor Organization Standards

The United Nation's International Labor Organization has identified eight conventions as fundamental to the rights of human beings at work, irrespective of countries' levels of development. The conventions cover the areas of:

- Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining;
- The elimination of forced and compulsory labor;
- The abolition of child labor, and;
- The elimination of discrimination in the workplace.

According to the ILO, these measures "set the basis for social justice in the workplace and provide a framework to ensure that people fairly share in the wealth that they have helped generate."

Applicable Local Laws

These are the laws of the country where the manufacturing or laundering of the product takes place. They include wage, working hour, non-wage benefits, health, labor, environmental and safety laws, legal guarantees of freedom of association, child labor laws, regulations on home-based work, building and fire codes, and laws relating to discrimination in hiring, promotion or compensation on the basis of race, disability, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or affiliation with any political, nongovernmental or civic group.

Non-Poverty Wage

In most countries, the legal minimum wage is a poverty wage that does not allow workers to pay for the cost of food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and other basic needs. Because wages amount to such a small fraction of the total retail price, even doubling workers' wages would result in a very small price increase.

Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining

Workers' right to freely form and join unions for the promotion and defense of their workplace interests is a basic human right. Workers should be able to influence workplace policies that impact their lives. An independent worker organization offers workers the best chance that they will have an effective voice in determining their wages and working conditions. Finally, organized workers are a vital force for expanding the share of total production that is sweatfree. And they provide a critical part of the political base that will encourage their governments to pursue more worker-friendly economic and social policies.

No Termination Without Just Cause

When workers try to organize, the sweatshop employer's most common anti-union tactic is firing union supporters. This sends a chilling message to coworkers: keep quiet or you will lose your job. Employers may also threaten to close a factory and shift production to some other country if workers organize a union, a tactic called "cut-and-run." By including "no termination without just cause" provisions in the sweatfree purchasing policy an institution signals that it will not do business with companies that suppress workers' right to organize by terminating union supporters.

Fact Sheet: Sweatshops are...

An international issue

- Millions of workers, mostly young women, toil in tens of thousands of sweatshops around the world.
- Brand CEOs and advertisers profit in the millions. The largest apparel companies have revenues in the billions.

At an example Nicaraguan factory¹

- Workers have to sew one Wal-Mart shirt every 15 minutes for \$0.09.
- The base wage of \$0.29-0.34/hour is less than half the government's estimate of what is required to meet basic subsistence level needs.
- Mandatory overtime: 12-15 hour shifts. Workers are at the factory a total of 65-79 hours/week.
- Jersey shorts enter the U.S. with a total customs value of \$3.55 each, which includes all production costs, shipping, and profit to factory owners. The shorts retail for \$26 at Kohl's.

Bangladesh example

- There are 1.8 million garment workers working in 3,780 export factories. 85% are young women.²
- None of these factories have unions with contracts.
- Sewers are paid just \$0.016 for each U.S. university cap they sew. The caps enter the U.S. with a total customs value of \$1.23. The average retail price in the U.S. is \$17.43.³

A domestic issue

- The U.S. garment industry grosses \$45 billion a year and employs more than one million workers.⁴
- More than half of the 22,000 sewing shops in the U.S. violate minimum wage and overtime laws; 75% violate health and safety laws. Over 50% of the shops can be considered "sweatshops".
- Studies conducted in 2000 found that 67% of Los Angeles garment factories and 63% of New York garment factories violate minimum wage and overtime laws. The same studies revealed that 98% of Los Angeles garment factories violate workplace health and safety standards by operating under conditions such as blocked fire exits, unsanitary bathrooms, and poor ventilation.
- In Los Angeles, nearly 70% of immigrant garment workers receive below minimum wage and are paid an average of

\$7,200 a year, amounting to less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the poverty level income for a three person family.

- In U.S. sweatshops, the sewing machine operators earn about 5% or less of the retail cost of goods.
- Sweatshops are a relatively recent return to the U.S. - not a problem that was never solved. There were few sweatshops between 1942 and 1979. The return of sweatshops to the U.S. is a direct product of transnational corporations financing sweatshops abroad.

A woman's issue

- 90% of sweatshop workers are young women between the ages of 15-25
- As an employment requirement, women at some Mexican and Central American plants are forced to take Depo-Provera shots to prevent pregnancy and so companies do not have to pay maternity leave.
- Too often, if a woman becomes pregnant or refuses to submit to forced birth control, she is fired.

An issue for all of us

- When we buy their products, our consumption support companies that use sweatshops. If on a large scale we prioritized our purchases differently, companies would have to change their practices.
- As consumers we are the key ingredient to ending the race to the bottom.



¹ "KB Manufacturing in Nicaragua." National Labor Committee, October 2003.

² National Labor Committee. See information on Bangladesh at www.nlcnet.org, 2004.

³ National Labor Committee. "Bangladesh: The Role of U.S. Universities and Student Solidarity," 2001.

⁴ All domestic statistics, except for the last bullet point, are from U.S. Department of Labor 2000 reports available at <http://www.dol.gov/esa/garment/index.htm>. Various calls to numerous divisions at the DOL did not reveal any more recent statistics. No staff members at the DOL knew of any current government No Sweat Initiative. The previous program that produced the reports was likely discontinued at the end of the Clinton Administration.

Common Questions and Answers

Source: Sweat-free Communities

What is a sweatshop?

- According to the US General Accounting Office, a sweatshop is an employer that violates more than one federal or state labor law regarding minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation, or industry regulation.
- Sweatshops are associated with the garment industry and the manufacture of other mass-produced items. They are often in developing countries, and are often staffed largely by women. Even if they are owned by American companies, the factories in other countries feel little pressure to abide by American standards of workplace safety or workers' rights. Instances of sexual harassment by superiors, physical violence against workers, and threats of violence or unemployment against workers who try to unionize are common.

What is a "living wage"? How is it different from minimum wage?

- Living wage is a term used to describe the minimum hourly wage necessary for a person to achieve some specific standard of living. It takes into account the economic indicators of the country to determine how much money is necessary to afford a quality of life deemed acceptable - for instance, the living wage in the Fitchburg/Leominster area is \$12.19/hr, whereas the living wage in a developing country would be less. A minimum wage is the lowest wage payable by law, and something that employers must legally abide by. It may be higher or lower than the living wage.

How can a Sweat-free purchasing policy make a difference?

- We can show companies and other large purchasers of sweatshop goods – including our cities and states - that we care about the conditions under which the products we buy are made. When they know that enough people care they will change the way they do business.
- Together, students have the power to change industries that are affected heavily by college apparel purchases. Cleaning up club apparel is a good starting point and a practical goal. By joining together in our decision to purchase clothing ethically, we can create significant demand for sweat-free conditions.
- Better working conditions abroad mean less downward pressure on wages and conditions here.
- A sweat-free purchasing policy tackles the root causes of sweatshops and introduces a vision of a new global economy where fairness, justice, and dignity are rewarded and not penalized.

What jobs would people have if they weren't working in sweatshops? Wouldn't they be worse off?

- There is ample evidence from Central America, Southeast Asia, and other regions over the last two decades that a hands-off approach to the market does not automatically lead to better working conditions and higher living standards for workers who enter sweatshop jobs. A sweatshop job is a dead-end job.
- Exploitative conditions will only change if we demand change. Sweatshop workers across the world are in fact demanding better conditions. We can support their struggles by organizing for sweat-free procurement policies.
- We are not demanding that sweatshops close down. Workers in sweatshops want jobs. The last thing we want is for the factory to close and workers to be laid off. But employers owe workers a decent job; they must respect labor laws in their factories, pay a living wage, and treat workers with dignity. Workers' goal and our goal is to improve working conditions, not shut down bad factories.

But some vendors will not disclose information about their contractors and supplier factories, they claim that it is confidential information; Others do not even have information on their supplier factories.

- Factory information can be and needs to be publicly accessible to enable independent third-party organizations to verify companies' claims about working conditions and report any code of conduct violations. Without public disclosure a Sweat-free policy is unenforceable.
- Companies that produce university logo clothing initially argued that factory disclosure would place them at a competitive disadvantage. But it turned out that many of these companies were producing clothing in the same factories and knew where their competitors were producing.

******The company I'm buying from doesn't own the facilities; they are contractors. If they are doing the wrong thing, how can you blame the company?***

- Major corporations often create the conditions for abuse in a factory by setting the terms of the contract, including low price, high volume, and quick turn-around time. The big players control the game: the ten largest retailers account for nearly 2/3 of all apparel sales in the U.S.
- Company claims of ignorance of working conditions are disingenuous. They have power over quality control. They could make sure workers' rights are respected.

Won't this be punishing good companies for the actions of a few bad apples?

- Human rights abuse in the global apparel industry is not an aberration, but the logical result of trade rules and industry relations that reward low wages and worker exploitation, and penalize decency and fairness in the workplace. As a result, sweatshops with their poverty wages, forced overtime, and dangerous working conditions are the norm for tens of millions of workers in the global apparel industry.
- Between 1995 and 2001 the U.S. Department of Labor repeatedly surveyed cutting and sewing shops in the major U.S. apparel centers – New York City, northern New Jersey, and L.A. These surveys found that 50-60% of the shops failed to pay either the minimum wage, or overtime, or both. In 1996, California state labor investigators found that 72% of the garment firms in Southern California had serious health or safety violations as well. The data show that exploitative conditions are “normal” at the heart of the U.S. apparel industry.

People don't run their businesses in foreign countries the same way we run them here in the United States. There are cultural differences in social responsibility.

- There is no evidence of cultural standards rendering sweatshop abuses acceptable anywhere. Around the world, workers organizing for better treatment demonstrate that they do not accept abuses. The degree of social responsibility in a factory or a region has more to do with the strength of a social movement demanding social responsibility than cultural acceptance or rejection of abuse.

SUPPLIER PRICE LIST

(Name, Description, *Sample products*, Website, Contact E-mail, approximate **price**)

Price quotes depend on the standard example of 50 one color t-shirts without screenprinting.
(Plain white shirts would be about a dollar less than the price listed for all suppliers.)

All American Clothing – Union made in Illinois, Kansas and Kentucky.

T-shirts, Polo shirts, Sweatshirts, Jackets

www.allamericanclothing.com, info@allamericanclothing.com

Offers Embroidery, **\$5.60/shirt**

Justice Clothing - An "employee-controlled cooperative." Union made.

T-shirts, long sleeves, tank tops, fleece.

www.justiceclothing.com, info@justiceclothing.com.

Offers Screenprinting, **\$5.50/shirt**

No Sweat - International Union factories, including "peace" factory in Bethlehem. Student discounts.

T-shirts, tanks, hoodies, shorts, caps.

www.nosweatapparel.com, wholesale@nosweatapparel.com

Offers organic, screenprinting. **\$6.00/shirt**, bulk \$5/shirt.

Hae Now – Small and mid-size organic cotton farmers, provides, training, funding and certification.

T-shirts, long sleeves.

www.haenow.com, (username: Eco, password: choice) info@haenow.com.

Offers organic. **\$6.20/shirt**

North Country Fair Trade – A local supplier for fair-trade factories in Central America.

T-shirts, tote bags.

www.ethicalgoods.org, northcountryfairtrade@comcast.net

Offers organic. **\$4-5/shirt.**

Cottonfield USA – More upscale. US Organic cotton and hemp. Chemical free. Made in Boston.

www.cottonfieldusa.com,

Offers organic. **\$9/shirt.**

Bulk only

Lifewear – Made in USA, union made.

Shirts with pockets, long sleeve, turtlenecks, sweatshirts.

www.lifewear.net, Lifewear99@aol.com

Minimum order 100, **\$4.25/shirt.**

edunLive - Sustainable, "grower to sewer" factory and retailer.

www.edun-live.com, www.edun-live.com/contact.aspx

'Cases' of 84 t-shirts of one size.

Organic Zuri

www.organiczuri.com/

Offers screenprinting. Usually minimum orders of 100. **\$6/shirt.**

Unionwear

www.unionwear.com/

Minimum order 72, **\$6.15/shirt.**

Helpful Hints

- Buying in bulk will generally save you money overall.
- Not all companies screenprint, you may need to bring the clothes to a local screenprinter or choose a different company that will do it themselves.
- Union-made is one way of guarantee fair trade. Use the sites:
 - www.unionlabel.org
 - www.shopunionmade.org

Brands to avoid – Just because these are “American Companies” doesn’t mean they don’t use sweatshops! The following Brands are actually infamous for their proven use of Sweatshop Labor.

American Eagle, Carrefour, Cintas, Dickies, Disney, Guess, Hanes, New Era, Speedo, Tommy Hilfiger, Guess, Toys “R” Us, L.L. Bean, Gap, Banana Republic, Old Navy, J. Crew, and Wal-Mart. (source: www.coopamerica.org)

Watch out – Made in USA doesn’t necessarily mean fair trade! A lot of manufacturers avoid labor laws by working in US territories, or “Free Trade” deregulation zones, such as near the Mexican border. Or they operate illegal sweatshops within major cities.

Changing your club's constitution

Pick one of the following:

Sweatshop Free Apparel Commitment

The _____ shows their support for ethical labor practices and human rights by committing to the exclusive purchase of sweatshop free apparel. Whereas “sweatshop free” apparel is defined as apparel produced by a manufacturer that makes sure that links in the garment chain follow international labor standards (ILO Conventions), which guarantee safe conditions with reasonable and adequate benefits.

Sweatshop Free and Organic Apparel Commitment

The _____ shows their support for ethical labor practices and human rights by committing to the exclusive purchase of sweatshop free, *organically sourced* apparel. Whereas “sweatshop free” apparel is defined as apparel produced by a manufacturer that makes sure that links in the garment chain follow international labor standards (ILO Conventions), which guarantee safe conditions with reasonable and adequate benefits.

How to update your constitution:

1. One of the club's administrators should login at my.brandeis.edu
2. Click the ClubCenter icon and click the name of your club.
3. Under the 'Documents and Links' section of the page, there should be a link to your constitution. If it's not visible, make sure you're logged in. Download the document and make what changes you'd like to it.
4. Under the 'Documents and Links' section of the page, next to the Constitution, there should be an 'edit' link. Clicking it will take you to a page with a link called 'update your constitution.'
5. Upload the new file with the same title (should be 'Constitution')
6. Hit "Submit and Upload"
7. As a courtesy, please e-mail one of the people on the front of this document that your club has changed their constitution

Local and International Screenprinters

Mirror Image, Inc.- Buy apparel through their large catalog of ethical and/or organic clothing. Ask for edunLive, Oxfam, or email for more “non-sweatshop” options.

<http://www.mirrorimage.com/catalogs.html>
sales@mirrorimage.com

Tshirt and sons- uses fair trade and organic apparel
<http://www.tshirtandsons.co.uk/>

Personalizers - Screenprinting and embroidery.
(781)-894-7077
<http://www.personalizers.com>
379 Moody St, Waltham, MA

Waltham Embroidery & Screen Printing Co.
(781) 893-0239
563 Moody St, Waltham, MA 02453

RC Silkscreen, INC- printing and embroidery
(617) 261-9980
<http://www.rcsilk.com/>
Boston, MA 02210

More Sweat-free Companies for apparel and other goods

American Apparel – Many options, however they are anti-union.
(americanapparel.net/)

Maggie Organics – Organic, Fair Trade (<http://www.organicclothes.com/>)

Garyline – Customized bottles, hats, frisbees, rulers, keychains, clipboards, mugs, mousepads, nalgens, and more. Union made. (<http://www.garyline.com>)

Best2Win – Customized political campaign products. Balloons, Bumper stickers, buttons, magnets, signs, etc. (<http://www.best2win.com/>)

EthixPromo – Fair trade companies working together. Bags, calendars, pens, and more (<http://www.ethixpromo.com>).