

## Welcome to Update.....

Jan 2008



Our very first electronic newsletter which will keep you updated on the latest developments and services offered by BLC. Don't miss out on our February training courses and register now for the 'Sourcing leather with confidence' conference, Hong Kong April 1. This issue also includes topical features concerning eco-leather and REACH compliance.

### BLC Training dates..... an opportunity not to be missed

BLC will be holding a number of training courses during February 2008.

All courses are lively and interactive, offer an opportunity to talk to experts about all aspects of leather production and use and include a visit to a tannery and/or a tour of BLC laboratories to see leather testing and problem solving at work.

Delegates are encouraged to bring samples and problems along for discussion and debate.

#### 1 day leather finishing course – February 1

Aimed at quality assurance, buyers and designers this practical course will explain leather finishing to give both performance and fashion effects and answer questions such as why does my leather change colour?, why does my leather fade? and why does the surface crack or peel during use?

#### 1 day understanding leather – February 12

Perfect for those new to the leather industry and also for designers, buyers and retailers of leather products, this course offers the perfect grounding of information and knowledge on leather as a material.

#### 1 day leather and footwear construction – February 14

Ideal for anyone involved in the footwear supply chain to learn all about how leather is made, classified and selected in terms of fitness for purpose for footwear end use. Also included will be footwear construction and product finishing including quality control and common footwear problems.

#### 3 day comprehensive understanding of leather – February 26-28

Suitable for all product sectors, this course is ideal for those who prefer a more detailed foundation in leather knowledge or building on previous training days. Offering an excellent intensive leather overview, delegates can also expect to be more knowledgeable in testing and specifications, legislation and banned chemicals and management of the supply chain and traceability.



Book now at [www.blcleathertech.com](http://www.blcleathertech.com)



### Upcoming Events.....

#### Sourcing leather with confidence

An international conference, scheduled to take place during the Asia Pacific Leather Fair in Hong Kong on 1 April 2008, is an ideal event for those selling leather, supplying to the leather industry or buying leather products and footwear in Asia.



With the ongoing trend towards responsible trading from all perspectives, including environmental, social and technical, the emphasis of this conference will be on responsible supply chain management.

An opportunity to:

- gather key information to help run your leather business more effectively
- shape your organisation to meet the changing needs of the environment
- gain essential knowledge on sourcing leather and crucial intelligence from influential brands and retailers
- develop your knowledge of leather and expand your networks

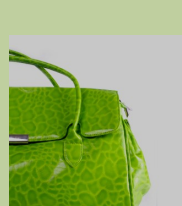
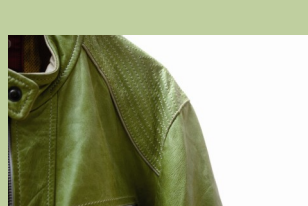
Speakers include: BASF, ISA/Tantec, Pentland Group, Business for Social Responsibility, PrimeAsia Leather Corporation, RSPCA, BLC Leather Technology Centre Ltd and International Council of Tanners.



Click here for Programme  
Click here for Registration form

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### What is an eco-leather?



BLC has been questioned many times recently as to the meaning of the term "eco leather". In the strict verbal sense of the definition, the term "eco leather" has no formal meaning. However, there is significant interest in leathers that imply improved environmental performance. So how do we interpret the current situation and understand the issues surrounding the interest in "eco leathers"?

The manufacture of leather does have an environmental impact, in as much as in the manufacturing process not all the inputs end up in the leather. Also when leather is disposed of the product becomes a waste material. What seems to have happened is that the gauge of a leather's "eco-ness" is measured by the absence of certain restricted chemicals, such as banned azo dyes, PCP, chrome VI, formaldehyde and an increasing list specified by brands; or the method of tannage rather than any consideration of the real environmental impact. This push originated from the automotive sector (where the recycling of automotive parts is regulated in Germany) but more recently by environmental pressure groups, eco labels, high street retailers or those seeking to gain competitive advantage through product positioning.

It is important to judge the relevant importance of all the different aspects so that products can be selected knowledgeably and relevant issues can be explained to customers.

Many people assume that vegetable tanned leather should have a preferred environmental profile, but the evidence does not support this. It should be noted that the whole purpose of tanning is to cross-link the collagen matrix to prevent putrefaction and hence decomposition.

On the other hand, chrome tanned leathers are often assumed to be less desirable because of their mineral content, or wrongly believed to be tanned with the toxic chrome VI salt. Leather today is tanned with inert chrome III and chrome III is essential for normal glucose, protein and fat metabolism and is thus an essential dietary element. This is not to say that chrome tanned leathers do not have end-of-life issues potentially greater than comparative tannages. Further work is ongoing at BLC in this respect to fully understand the biodegradability of different leathers, and their consequential environmental impact.

The aldehyde tanned leathers meet the needs of the automotive sector and appear to fit a niche within children's products that need to comply with EN71/3, but they can have handling, effluent treatment and higher energy consumption issues.

If we assume that the different tannage types discussed above have similar impacts we must consider the way the leather is made. Our belief, based on extensive research and industry knowledge, is that environmentally preferred leather can be defined by two key parameters:

- How the leather is manufactured
- What inputs are used to manufacture it

Dedicated research has shown that a significant part of the environmental impact of leather is in the manufacturing processes, taking it from a hide to finished leather. In this respect it is the environmental stewardship practice of tanners coupled with chemical selection that should determine how eco friendly a leather is. If we take the model adopted by some of the world's leading brands that have been working on these issues for the past two years, we can determine the following areas of leather manufacture that have the most significant potential impact;

- Management of restricted substances
- Energy consumption
- Air emissions
- Waste management (hazardous and non hazardous)
- Environmental management systems
- Water consumption
- Control of manufacturing processes
- Effluent treatment
- Chrome management
- Traceability of material

In terms of the selection of inputs for the manufacturing process we need to consider the use of certain materials that could give an improved eco profile to leather. These are elements such as;

- Biodegradable wetting agents for soaking
- Reduced sulphide processing
- Non synthetic or polymeric re-tannage systems
- Natural dyestuffs
- Vegetable oil based fatliquors
- Vegetable oil based fatliquors to reduce waste such as HVLP or roller coating
- Biodegradable in 12 months or less

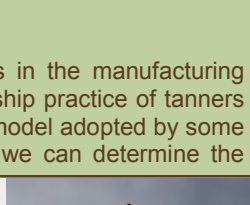
In summary, although there is no current definition, these are the key elements we believe should determine an eco leather;

- Control of leather manufacturing processes
- Clean technology chemical selection in the process
- Effective management of restricted substances within the leather
- A measure of the end of life impact

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### Legislation

#### Critical Pre-registration phase of chemical substances for REACH



Chemical manufacturers and importers are being urged to prepare for pre-registration of all their substances, regardless of current production, during the six-month window provided next year under the REACH Regulation.

Nearly ten years in preparation, the EU's new chemicals licensing regime, REACH, will come into force on 1 June. The date will set the clock ticking for an 11-year process that aims to see some 30,000 substances registered for sale in the EU once risk data on them have been submitted.

The advice is that companies (mainly chemical suppliers and importers) submit basic data on all their chemicals to the European Chemicals Agency during the pre-registration window between 1 June and 1 December 2008.

Such substances would then be pre-registered. Companies would then take part in substance information exchange forum (SIEF) allowing them to reach agreement on classification and labelling of substances and to decide if they need to share test data with others by forming consortia.

To pre-register, companies need only to provide:

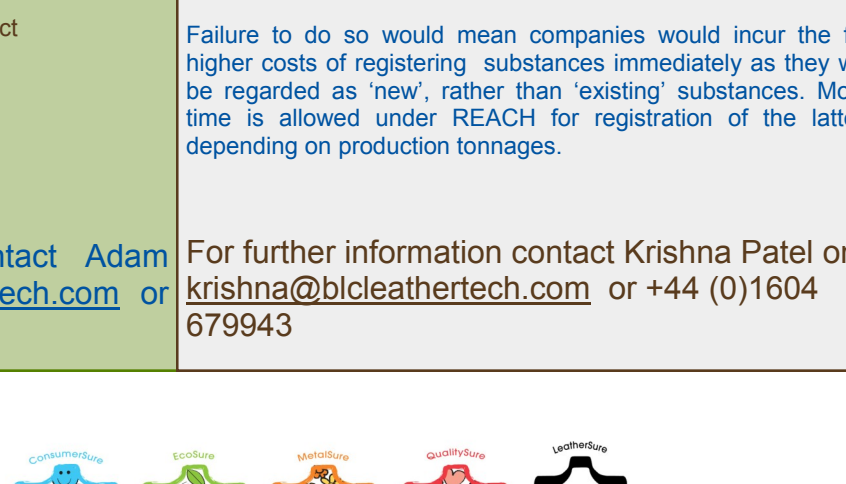
- The names of their substances.
- The name of the companies for which they are registering these substances.
- Any similar substances that may offer the opportunity for read-across of likely properties.
- An indication of which tonnage threshold under the Regulation applies to their substances.

Failure to do so would mean companies would incur the far higher costs of registering substances immediately as they will be regarded as 'new', rather than 'existing' substances. More time is allowed under REACH for registration of the latter, depending on production tonnages.

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### Coming up next time.....

#### Introducing the Sure family



**Disclaimer** BLC Leather Technology Centre Ltd has made all reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of the information provided. However, the information should not be relied upon as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice. Due care and attention should be exercised when using this information.

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