



The RSPCA Good Business Awards

>>> ANIMAL WELFARE AND THE FASHION INDUSTRY

The RSPCA is opposed to the infliction of pain and suffering on, or the killing of, any animal in the name of fashion.

There are many issues surrounding animal welfare and the fashion industry that fashion houses, retailers and buyers may not be aware of or have chosen to ignore. Through the Good Business Awards, the RSPCA aims to inspire companies in the fashion industry to revise their policies on deriving animal products for their collections. Attention to the tracing and sourcing of raw materials is key to improving animal welfare.

We also want to reward companies that are exploring new ideas and developing interesting and innovative solutions to the promotion of higher animal welfare in fashion.

>>> THE CASE AGAINST FUR

The RSPCA is opposed to the farming and trapping of fur-bearing animals because these practices cause considerable suffering.

Despite a growing awareness of the ethical issues surrounding fur it continues to appear on the catwalks and the Autumn 2010 collections saw over 400 designers using real fur. Statistics from the Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs for the 10 years from 1999 to 2009 show a 169 per cent growth in fur sales.

Many consumers believe that where animal fur is used in the production of clothes the animal will have been killed for its meat and not just for its fur. This is not the case. Eighty five per cent of the world's fur originates from fur farms with mink and fox being the most commonly bred animals¹. The animals are often confined to tiny barren cages set in rows in sheds containing many thousands of animals without the freedom to pursue biological and behavioural needs.

An RSPCA survey showed that 93 per cent of people would not wear real fur*, but a lot of shoppers are accidentally buying real fur assuming that it's fake because it is cheap and not clearly labelled. Ninety five per cent of people said they would refuse to wear real fur.

The slaughter of wild animals caught specifically for their fur also causes concern. The traps can tear flesh, cut tendons and ligaments and break bones, causing untold suffering. Conservation is also an issue - enforcing a fur-free policy will ensure that no animal from an endangered or threatened species has been killed for its skin.

* A TNS opinion poll was conducted in Great Britain via TNS PhoneBus, a telephone Omnibus survey. A representative sample of 2,004 adults aged from 16 and above were interviewed between 24 September 2010 and 3 October 2010. Note 1. International Fur Trade Federation. The Socio-Economic Impact of European Fur Farming. www.iftf.com

>>> KARAKUL: UNBORN LAMBS USED FOR FUR

Why is this an issue?

Karakul lambskin is rarely a by-product of the meat industry. Indeed, the value of the pelts drop once the prized curls begin to unfold following birth.

In 2001 the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) investigated the production of Karakul pelts. The research showed that the ewe has between three and five lambs during her life and all but her last are taken away from her to be slaughtered for their pelts within a few days of birth. While pregnant with the final lamb, the ewe's throat is slit. Her uterus is then cut open and the dying or dead foetus is removed and killed for its fur.

Labelling on fur garments can be misleading, which means the consumer can't identify which animal the skin has come from. Karakul is also labelled as broadtail, Persian lamb, swakara, krimmer and astrakhan.

What constitutes good practice?

- Your company should not buy or use real fur. This should be actively promoted to your staff and customers.
- Develop and implement a 'no-fur' policy and ensure all your buyers, suppliers and staff are aware of it.
- Introduce standards for labelling and ensure that all garments with fake fur are clearly labelled.

>>> LEATHER AND SKINS

Why is this an issue?

Contrary to popular belief, not all leather is a by-product of the meat industry. In particular, there are ethical concerns about animals which are only reared so that their skins can be used in the production of high quality, luxury fashion items. These include snakes, crocodiles, other reptiles (often referred to as 'exotics') and ostriches.

Most of this trade is legal. The same animal welfare concerns apply to these 'exotics' as apply to the breeding of cattle for meat and leather: how the animals are reared, transported and slaughtered.

When animals are captured from the wild, there are further welfare concerns about how the capture and/or killing occurred. There are also conservation issues surrounding the capture of wild animals that are endangered or threatened species. There is evidence of a substantial illegal trade in skins from protected wild-caught animals.

What constitutes good practice?

- Your company should have a policy not to source skins from wild-caught animals, endangered or threatened species. Information on conservation status can be obtained from CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and the IUCN Red List (compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources). Go to: www.cites.org and www.iucnredlist.org

- If you are unsure of the source of leather, do not purchase items or use the skin.
- Always ensure that leather is obtained as a by-product of the meat industry.
- Your company should have in place a process that monitors the provenance of leather and leather items, from the farm through to the finished product, ensuring the welfare of the animal at every stage of the process.
- Do not use skins from exotics as outlined above.
- Your company should ensure that the items it stocks and sells are clearly labelled to show the following information:
 - country of origin where the animal was reared
 - the species of animal used
 - whether or not the animal is a by-product of the meat industry.

>>> MERINO WOOL FROM AUSTRALIA

Why is this an issue?

In Australia a painful husbandry procedure known as 'mulesing' is often carried out to reduce the risk of fly strike on merino sheep. Fly strike occurs when flies are attracted to soiled areas of a sheep's fleece and lay their eggs. Maggots then hatch out and begin to eat into the sheep's flesh. Due to the huge size of many farms in Australia sheep may not be seen for several weeks and so if a sheep is affected by fly strike it is likely to die.

Mulesing involves the cutting away of skin from around the sheep's rump in an attempt to produce a smooth wool-free area that is less attractive to flies. In many cases, no pain relief or anaesthesia is used. Whilst we are aware that fly strike causes major suffering and even death, the RSPCA also has serious concerns about the welfare issues surrounding the mulesing procedure and finds it unacceptable. At the very least, producers who continue to practice mulesing should be applying effective topical anaesthetics to reduce the pain and suffering of the procedure. They should also be committing to introducing welfare friendly alternatives to mulesing as soon as possible.

What constitutes good practice?

- If your company uses merino wool in the production of any products or sells items that include merino wool, it should trace its source so it can establish that the wool was produced without inflicting unnecessary harm on the sheep.
- Producers using alternative approaches to protect against flystrike such as 'clips' or injectable intra-dermals are acceptable until a long term solution is available.
- The preferred option for the RSPCA is the pursuance of selective breeding of sheep for naturally barer breeches so that the risk of fly strike is significantly lower in the first place.

>>> CASHMERE AND THE WELFARE OF GOATS

Why is this an issue?

Cashmere is collected from goats either by grooming or in some countries, by shearing. During grooming the hair must not be plucked from the animal but removed patiently and gently with a comb. Animals must only be shorn by trained, competent operators using appropriate and well-maintained equipment.

They require sufficient space, an enriched environment, constant access to shelter, access to sufficient and appropriate food and clean water, company of their own kind, and the opportunity to express browsing behaviour.

Journey times should be kept to a minimum frequency and duration with sufficient space. During loading/unloading and movement on foot, animals should never be encouraged to move by hitting them with sticks or using goads.

What constitutes good practice?

- Goats should always be handled carefully and gently. They should not be pulled or grabbed by the horns, legs, ear, tail, hair, etc.
- A comb or brush with blunt ended teeth or bristles should be used during grooming to avoid causing discomfort or injury to the animal.
- Animals should not be forcefully restrained. Food can help to keep the animal occupied and still during grooming.
- When being shorn, animals must remain upright position. Equipment must be well maintained and disinfected between animals to reduce cross-infection.
- Goats should not be tethered, except for short periods of time whilst under constant supervision in order to undertake a necessary procedure such as grooming.

>>> WELFARE OF ANGORA RABBITS

Why is this an issue?

Angora rabbits are sometimes reared in systems designed to preserve the condition of their coats, e.g. individual wire cages, rather than in environments that meet their behavioural and physical needs. Rabbits are athletic, social animals, and any system for rearing, must provide them with opportunities to carry out their natural behaviours, to exercise and to interact appropriately with other rabbits.

Harvesting of growing angora fibres by plucking may cause rabbits pain and distress. Alternatively, the fibres can be carefully shorn or, for moulting breeds, fibres can be collected during grooming or from the floor of the rabbits' enclosure.

What constitutes good practice?

- If the coat is shorn, this should be carried out carefully in a way that does not cause the rabbits injury or distress. Only competent, trained stock-keepers should care for and handle the rabbits.
- The coat should be kept short enough so that it can see properly, communicate with other rabbits and carry out their self-grooming behaviours.
- Female and young rabbits should be housed in appropriate pairs/social groups.
- Enclosures should be large enough to allow normal movements and exercise, such as hopping steps and allow rabbits to rear up on their hind legs without their ears touching the roof/top. There should be separate areas for resting, feeding, hiding, defecating and exercise and should include an area of solid flooring that is large enough to allow all the rabbits to rest together. Clean bedding material (e.g. hay, straw or shredded paper) should be provided to allow rabbits to keep warm and to dig.

- Rabbits should eat a hay-based diet. The provision of edible gnawing objects (e.g. wooden sticks) further enriches the rabbit's environment.

>>> FEATHERS AND DOWN

Why is this an issue?

The use of feathers and down in fashion is primarily in household goods such as cushions, duvets and pillows. Feathers can also be found as a trim on fashion items such as earrings, fascinators and hats, bags, scarves and jackets, etc.

There is a possibility that feathers from some countries are collected by live plucking and this causes unnecessary pain and distress to the birds. Feathers should always be sourced as a by-product of the meat industry. Attention needs to be paid to the size of the feather and the breed to ensure the feathers are not a by-product of foie gras production.

What constitutes good practice?

- The country of origin of the feathers should be established to give an indication of how the birds were reared and for what purpose.
- Identifying the source of the feathers/down in order to establish the farms and then slaughter houses from which the feathers originated. This enables the slaughter standards to be assessed.
- Do not buy or sell products where Eider down is used as it is likely live plucking has taken place.
- Be aware of the tell tale signs that feathers/down are from unacceptable systems, e.g. feathers from birds reared for foie gras production will be a certain type of bird and the feathers will tend to be greasy. Birds that have been live plucked tend to be older birds with larger feathers.
- Consider using feathers/down from UK sources from which meat is already sourced. This allows a robust audit trail to be established and it is easier to influence and achieve standards. It also means that standards can be applied and known for both products.