

14.-17.5.2019



## “IT IS SUSTAINABILITY AND RECYCLABILITY THAT ARE CURRENTLY THE CHALLENGES”

*With ‘Sustainability at Techtextil’ and ‘Sustainability at Texprocess’, Techtextil and Texprocess, to be held from 14 to 17 May 2019, will be showcasing the various approaches to sustainability amongst their respective exhibitors. An independent, international jury of experts in sustainability matters assessed the participating companies on the basis of current national and international sustainability seals and marks. We spoke with Jan Laperre from Centexbel and a member of the jury.*

### **Where do the biggest challenges for your sector lie, as far as sustainability is concerned?**

We are currently principally concerned with recyclable, sustainable clothing and other textile products. With regard to the high levels of chemicals used in the production processes and in the various individual stages of fibre manufacture, as well as in the textile finishing procedures, it is sustainability and recyclability that are currently the biggest challenges.

### **Is that equally true for natural and man-made fibres?**

Fibres that need less acreage for cultivation and/or use smaller quantities of water, chemicals and energy will become more and more important in future. And so too will those that can be more easily recycled, without losing any of their mechanical properties. In this regard, hemp is set to win out over cotton when it comes to clothing. Moreover, fibres that are manufactured from biomass such as wood shavings or other waste wood products will increasingly come to replace fibres that are planted and harvested in an agricultural process. Viscose, Tencel and other synthetic fibres will increasingly squeeze out traditional cotton.

The picture is similar when it comes to synthetic fibres. The amount of chemicals used, the energy required and the opportunities for recycling will, in future, be the major deciding factors in the choice of fibres for use in the manufacture of textiles. In practical terms, that means that PET fibres will become more important than any other synthetic fibre.

### **Which areas of the textile sector are particularly progressive? Are there any reasons for that?**

For industrial apparel (workwear, PPE), developed mainly in Europe, the focus is much more on sustainability than it is in the world of fashion textiles and, here, the emphasis is mainly on apparel. In terms of sourcing and the costs involved, longer life cycles for textile products, ease of upkeep and ease of care are coming to play an ever more important role.

### **Can you describe the challenges of the future?**

Dematerialisation, i.e. the use of the smallest possible amounts of material, restriction of the use of poisonous substances – where the key word is REACH requirements – protection of textiles through better washing and drying procedures, as well as recyclability, will be the crucial drivers in the development and design of textile products. For recycled textiles to be re-usable, we need to be able to bleach them efficiently and remove all

chemical substances from the old textiles. Chemical recycling processes are better suited to this than mechanical recycling procedures. Finding environmentally friendly alternatives to oil and dirt repellents is one of the big challenges we face.

In the context of the circular economy, the re-use of clothing and second-hand clothing is also becoming a more and more important issue. Old clothes are almost never worn until they are no longer serviceable and can, therefore, still be of use to others. The interdisciplinary cooperation between the textile, plastics, composite materials and wood sectors is vital to be able to re-cycle the maximum amount of materials and re-use them in new products.

Text: Kirsten Rein

**Lilliffer Seiler**