

## DETOX IMPLEMENTATION- HOW WOULD WE START?



### What are the facts?

Chemicals are an integral part of textile and footwear manufacturing industries. Elimination of all types of hazardous chemicals from the supply chain entering through all possible pathways is generally termed as Detox. However, the “Detox” is not as simple as the word. I believe, most of the retailers/brands struggling to even find the entry point of detox implementation within the supply chain. My aim of this paper is to give some lights on those who really want to implement detox but do not getting right edge to start.

Some points, I wanted to share before starting the main paragraph, assuming it will help to understand the current scenario-

- I am with textile and footwear industries since last 11 years and hardly find any textile or leather industries who manufacture their own chemicals rather they purchase. So what is the driving force for a textile/ footwear industry to use hazardous chemicals, price? Lack of knowledge? Or awareness? My observation is like- 60% lack of awareness, 20% lack of knowledge, 10% price and the rest 10% miscellaneous.
- In almost 90% of the cases, the decisions regarding the purchase of chemicals are taken by middle management of a factory, for textile industry dye house manager/ printing in-charge, etc. who are not very concern about the ultimate consequences of chemicals rather deeply focused on their day to day production.

- On the other hand, I believe the same percentages of the designers / buyers are not aware about the used raw materials quality in terms of hazardous chemicals and the consequences of their design; in general I can say, the life cycle of the product.
- The difference of total production cost of a T-Shirt/ a pair of shoe by using the alternative chemicals and traditional chemicals are less than 5%, if it is converted to product price differences it will be less than 2%. It depends on lot of other factors, this is my general estimation but in supply chain there are lots of other things by which you can balance this 2%.
- In 90% of the cases, there are very suitable alternatives for identified hazardous chemicals (for example I would say those 11 classes of hazardous chemicals as identified by Greenpeace Detox campaign or ZDHC group.) For the rest 10% chemicals (e.g. heavy metal based dyes), alternatives are available with minimum content (e.g. ZDHC MRSL compliant).

### **Detox Journey**

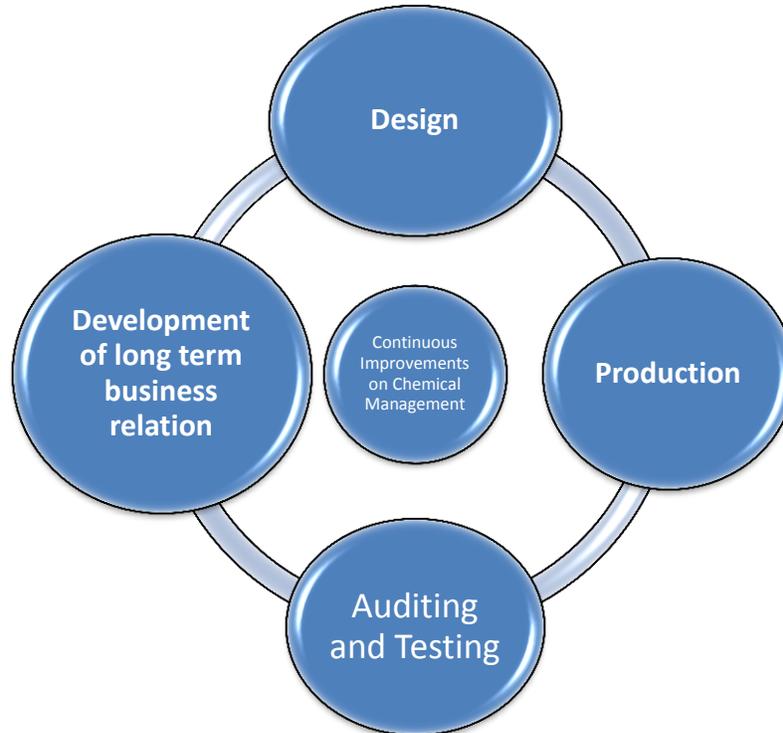
Now I would like to go to main topic, if a retailer/ brand committed to be detox, from where they should start? Frankly speaking, to me this is a close loop system; you can start from anywhere but before that please be ensured you are convinced enough to do that, here I wanted to mean- be ensure, you realize the necessity of detoxifying, if you want to do it to minimize external pressure, you can never rather will be buried under pressure.

Just to make the process more clear, I here explain the implementation of Detox through the traditional management system model, of which I consider “Design Decision” as the first step.

### **Take Proper Design Decision**

So, as usual, start with planning, a proper planning should be started from the top of the supply chain- from your product designer/ buyers.

- Please ensure your designers/ buyers are aware about the consequences of each materials used in their designed product, first arrange awareness rising session for them. Adopt intelligent design system- guide them to discuss with your material department to find the best available alternative materials in terms of hazardous chemicals.
- Regarding color/ printing issue, you can guide your material department to work closely with the chemical manufacturer to identify the best suitable alternatives. I hope most of the renowned chemical manufacturers are eager to work with you on this as it will create a win-win situation for both of you.



### Share your plan with production units

- Please ensure, your total supply chain is transparent, you know the sources of each and every item they procure to manufacture your product. Arrange necessary training for your production units to let them know about your commitment and planning. Share your design decision with them and seek their cooperation. Introduce the chemical company with whom your designer work already and let them the opportunity to do the same exercise in bulk production stage.
- Once your suppliers are convinced, help them with necessary tools like guidance documents to educate their peoples in purchasing, storing and using the better raw materials.
- Help them to develop the inventory of chemicals they use in their production. You can develop an online portal where your suppliers upload their chemical inventory regularly, if your supplier is not a vertically integrated one, request them to cascade down your message to their suppliers and upload chemical inventories on behalf of their suppliers.
- Build confidence of the suppliers so that they are open enough, at certain stage you can request them to disclose the name of other customer for which they work, discuss with those other brands/ retailers, seek their cooperation and develop a good working relation with them, so that at minimum level they support your activities with the supplier.

### Auditing and Testing

- You can incorporate chemical management audit in to your regular code of conduct auditing. My preference is auditing with brands/retailers own capacity by motivated individual who simultaneously can audit and can help the suppliers in closing the audit non-compliance issues. You can go for waste water testing if you think that the suppliers is capable enough to control their input and you have enough confidence that they are continuing the process since last six months. Once wastewater and sludge testing reports are in your hand, linked those up with

chemical inventory and find the correlation. If the test result shows the evidence of any hazardous chemicals, discuss with your suppliers. For such cases, you can arrange tri-parties meeting among you, your suppliers and chemical manufacturers.

### **Develop of Long term Business Relation**

You are now about to complete the first cycle of detox implementation, so in action, you can use your audit findings and customize your methodology. Here from my own experience, I can provide you some feedback -

- Once you have enough confidence on your suppliers, decrease the frequency of auditing and testing. It will give them some relax and also cut down some of your cost, which you can feed in the product price as incentive to work better.
- Based on your 1<sup>st</sup> year activity, select a group of best performer, acknowledges their performance and provides them some incentives by means of better business/ direct price increment (by reducing testing cost, RSL failure case, etc.) which will help in sustaining the improvement. Besides, also highlights their internal cost savings.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, my personal opinion is- the best starting point for the implementation of Detox is design stage which I compare with the planning of traditional Management System Cycle. But I would never agree with the testing as a starting point of Detox implementation, it will give you nothing rather will be confused. Now, it is your decision from which point you want to start.