

LWG meets at TFL Italia

By Adam Hughes, BLC Leather Technology Centre Ltd, Contracted Facilitator for the Leather Working Group

The autumn meeting of the Leather Working Group (LWG) was held at TFL Italia in Montebello on October 21 immediately after the Lineapelle fair. With more than 95 delegates in attendance, including representatives from brands, leather manufacturers and suppliers from around the world, this proved once again to be a significant forum for the global leather industry.

The LWG are very grateful to TFL for hosting the meeting and associated dinner which was held at the TFL Academy in Montebello. The venue, facilities and organisational support were outstanding, adding to the comfort and enjoyment for those attending.

This was a key meeting with guests from brands and suppliers from other leather manufacturing sectors such as upholstery and leather goods attending to learn more about the LWG, its aims and achievements since its inception in 2005. When the LWG started it was primarily footwear based. However, following its success in developing and implementing an environmental stewardship protocol and successfully auditing approximately 20% of the footwear leather supply chain, the decision was taken earlier in the year to widen the scope of the LWG to include other industry sectors.

The LWG is managed by an Executive Committee made up of brands, leather manufacturers and suppliers and changes to the committee membership were announced and implemented at the meeting. Representatives from Nike and PrimeAsia Leather Corporation were replaced by Adidas-group and Sadesa respectively. These changes are part of the regular process of electing new members to the committee, representing the brands, leather manufacturers and suppliers once their term of office has elapsed. The departing committee members were thanked for their dedicated work and commitment on behalf of the Leather Working Group.



An overview of benchmarking data demonstrated continued growth in LWG penetration with 140 first time audits completed, an increase of approximately 28% over the past year.

105 sites now hold current audit certification, including 25 wet-blue producers. In addition, significant savings in both water and energy had been made by leather manufacturers from their first to third audits – a very positive trend. It was stressed that all information relating to audits is strictly confidential.

Open discussion

With time allocated for open discussion, members were encouraged to share their views, concerns and observations relating to the work of the LWG and different aspects of the audit protocol. There was vigorous discussion about traceability of splits and small skins from rural communities – artisan sourcing/small volumes/small holdings – and how best to manage this area which was having an impact on supply chain ratings and subsequently the ratings achievable by some leather manufacturers.

It was reported that following communications with Greenpeace, the brands and the LWG on the subject of deforestation in Brazil, the LWG membership had been balloted to achieve

a consensus of opinion on whether or not the LWG should issue a statement of position on the proposed legislative changes to the Forest Code and potential negative impacts that may be caused as a result. The outcome of the vote was in favour of issuing a statement, which will be posted on the LWG website.

Presentations:

Dr Victoria Addy of BLC gave a presentation on the challenges of RSL alignment. This is an important issue for leather manufacturers in relation to rationalisation of testing requirements. A comparison of RSL data from six major footwear brands relating to leather and coated leather identified only 10% commonality of restricted substances collectively for the brands, with significant variations in how they were managed. The findings re-confirmed the complexity of working towards brand alignment.

Speaking on behalf of AFIRM (Apparel and Footwear International RSL Management Group), Greg Montello said that AFIRM was made up of 14 brands who embraced the aim 'To reduce the use and impact of harmful substances in the apparel and footwear supply chain'. Reference was made to the AFIRM RSL guidance document and tool kit, including guidance on reasonable testing programmes and



Dr Peter Amann, CEO of TFL Group, welcoming delegates to the meeting

energy source. A number of tanneries have already adopted solar thermal systems, with the attendant benefits.

Deforestation

With deforestation in the Amazon continuing to be a key global issue with implications for the brands and leather manufacturers, the agenda included two presentations on this subject.

Nathalie Walker of the National Wildlife Fund gave an overview of the work and progress being made by the NWF.

Sarah Shoraka of Greenpeace provided information on the Greenpeace initiative to investigate, expose and confront trade in products causing forest destruction and climate change with reference to actions taken and agreements reached. During the course of the presentation Greenpeace raised concerns about broken commitments from some meat packers.

Feedback from members and guests attending the meeting was very positive, showing widespread support for the LWG, with the positive momentum generated in the leather sector being seen as one of the most successful initiatives to align the industry.

The next LWG meeting will be held in Asia around the time of the Asia Pacific Leather Fair in Hong Kong (March 28-30, 2012). The date and venue will be announced on the LWG website. ■

promotion of chemical alternatives.

Carsten Aschoff of Aschoff Solar outlined the benefits of using solar power to replace traditional energy sources for heat processes in the tannery, including tanning, retanning, drying and finishing. With energy savings high on everyone's agenda, solar thermal energy provides an efficient and competitive renewable

References

For further information about the work of the Leather Working Group visit www.leatherworkinggroup.com or contact info@leatherworkinggroup.com



Safetan: Cleaner and safer working

Earlier in 2011 Dutch leather chemical maker, Smit & Zoon introduced Safetan BB 003, a bio-based tightening agent that is in line with the company's sustainability drivers.

Safetan BB 003 is a completely readily biodegradable bio-based retanning agent that is free of RSL chemicals (Restricted Substance List) such as formaldehyde. This enables the tanner to work cleaner and safer without negative effects on the leather quality.

Background

This product is based on bio-polymers that are sustainable and made from biological materials which can be grown season after season.

When the used bio-polymers are compared to the traditional amino resins there are big environmental advantages. Bio-polymers have lower carbon emissions and reduce carbon dioxide quantities in the atmosphere. The crops grown for this application reabsorb the carbon dioxide, which means that this results in a carbon footprint close to zero. Only the processing of the crops and the modification process to obtain the required bio-polymer contribute to CO₂ emissions. These values can be regarded as negligible compared to the CO₂ emissions needed to produce common amino resins from petrochemicals.

Safetan BB 003 is at least 70% sustainable while common amino resins only have a score of 0 – 2%. The remaining part (30%) of the product consists of >99% biological material.

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