Greenpeace warns of chemicals in global fashion

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A model carries an IV bag during the "Toxic Threads - The Big Fashion Stitch-up" fashion parade organized by environment action group Greenpeace to highlight chemical contamination in the fashion industry, in Beijing. Two-thirds of high-street garments tested in a study by Greenpeace contained potentially harmful chemicals, the group said, highlighting the findings with a "toxic" fashion show in Beijing.

Two-thirds of high-street garments tested in a study by Greenpeace contained potentially harmful chemicals, the group said Tuesday, highlighting the findings with a "toxic" fashion show in Beijing.

The environmental campaign group is pushing for fashion brands to commit to "zero discharge of all hazardous chemicals" by 2020 and to require suppliers to publicise any toxic chemicals they release into the environment.

Greenpeace said its investigation tested 141 garments from 20 top global fashion brands purchased in 29 countries and regions in April of this year for chemicals that might harm the environment or human health.

The garments were made in at least 18 countries, mostly in the developing world, according to Greenpeace. Samples tested included jeans, trousers, t-shirts, dresses and underwear, it said.

The tests found that 89 of the garments contained "detectable levels" of nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs), which it said can break down into hormone disrupting chemicals.

A Chinese model with her arm in a sling walks during the "Toxic Threads - The Big Fashion Stitch-up" fashion parade organized by Greenpeace to highlight chemical contamination in the fashion industry, in Beijing. Greenpeace said its investigation tested 141 garments from 20 top global fashion brands purchased in 29 countries and regions in April of this year for chemicals that might harm the environment or human health.

"Even the apparently small, but cumulative quantities of a substance such as NPE in individual items of clothing, which are legally allowed, can still be damaging," the group said in its report.

At the fashion show in Beijing, one model sporting leopard-print trousers carried an IV bag filled with orange goo, while another in an ivory bustier wore a bulging neck brace and face mask.

Another model with black powder caked around her eyes like bruises

posed grimly with her arm in a sling.

"Major fashion brands are turning us all into fashion victims by selling us clothes that contain hazardous chemicals that contribute to toxic water pollution around the world, both when they are made and washed," Li Yifang, senior toxics campaigner for Greenpeace East Asia, said in a release.

The report, titled "Toxic Threads: The Big Fashion Stitch-Up", also said that "high levels of toxic phthalates" were found in four products and "cancer-causing amines from the use of azo dyes" were found in two products.

"As global players, fashion brands have the opportunity to work on global solutions to eliminate the use of hazardous substances throughout their product lines and to drive a change in practices throughout their supply chains," the report said.

With fashion seasons coming closer together, more clothes are piling up in landfills more frequently, Greenpeace said.

"As fashion gets more and more globalised, more and more consumers worldwide are becoming fashion's victims while contributing to the industry's pollution," Greenpeace's Li said.

"But it doesn't have to be so."

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