

PROFESSIONAL TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING FIBER CONTENT (77)

In my profession as a garment analyst it is important to know the fiber content. It tells me how the fabric should be cleaned and what products can safely be used for stain removal. Some garments may not have labels indicating the fiber content or the labels on the garment may have come off. It is not enough to try to identify the fabric by sight and feel. Manufacturers can make micro polyester and rayon resemble silk. A knitted sweater can be wool or an exact look alike made or acrylic. Non washable rayon and acetate should be identified before any attempts are made to clean it. There are some garments that I have come across with a “Dryclean” label. If I ascertain the fiber content to be polyester I know that I can use water to clean it.

PROCEDURE FOR TESTING

The first thing that you have to do is obtain a small sample of the fabric from an inside seam or an unexposed area of the garment. This can be done by snipping off a small piece of the fabric. You can even obtain a small fabric sample on shirts by looking inside the pocket area which often has excess fabric. Even on knit fabrics you can obtain a fabric sample by picking off some of the surface fibers or nap with your fingers and rolling the loose fibers into a small yarn. You can even unravel a few yarns from an unexposed seam edging.

BURN TEST

The burn test is the quickest and easiest way to identify the fiber content of the fabric. Take the small fabric sample that you have and hold it with a pair of tweezers. You are now going to use a match to burn the sample and observe the following:

- (1) how it burns**
- (2) odor after you blow out the flame**
- (3) wait for the sample to cool and attempt to crush it**

Important-If you do not let the sample fabric cool you can seriously burn your fingers.

FIBER REACTION TO BURNING

Cotton, Rayon, Linen-burns with a yellow leaping flame, creeping ember after match is removed. The ash left is light gray and fluffy-odor is burning paper. The burn test is not distinguished between cotton and non washable rayon. Identify by wetting a strand or yarn. Cotton is difficult to break while non washable rayon will snap easily.

(2)

Silk or Wool-When burned the yarn fries and sizzles-ceases after match is removed-leaves a gray or black hard bead that can be easily crushed with your fingers. Smells like burning feathers or hair.

Acetate-Burns by sputtering, melting and fusing. Leaves a hard black bead that is difficult to crush when cooled. Has a pungent like vinegar odor. To further identify acetate put a drop of acetone or nail polish remover on sample. Acetate will dissolve.

Polyester-Difficult to ignite. Shrinks from flame and is self extinguishing. Leaves a round shiny black hard bead that is difficult to crush. Has a pungent odor.