

WHAT ARE SOFTENING AGENTS? (106)

Softening agents are cationic products which means that they have a positive electrical charge and an attraction to fabrics. Softening agents coat the yarn with a lubricating action making it soft and supple. The soft and supple condition gives the fabric the ability to relax and resist wrinkling. The other property that softening agents have is to reduce static electricity. Static electricity occurs because fabrics rub together creating friction and electrical charge. Liquid softening agents are better than dryer sheets. The lubricating agents in softening agents reduce friction and the fabrics ability to produce this electrical charge. Synthetic fabrics such as polyester and acrylic as well as soft napped fabrics are more apt to pick up an electrical charge.

EFFECT OF SOFTENING AGENTS ON FABRICS

Wool Sweaters-The softening agent is an important ingredient for wetcleaning wool sweaters. Wool is a natural fabric with scales and a yarn structure that is similar to a telescope. Under certain conditions of heat, moisture and mechanical action yarn draws up causing shrinkage, matting, felting and stiffness. The softening agent coats the yarn giving the yarn softness. This causes the yarn to slip and slide reducing the wools ability to shrink, mat and felt. The effectiveness of softening agents is especially important on soft textured wools and angoras. I can wetclean an angora garment and have results that is as soft and fluffy as if it were drycleaned. When wetcleaning wool sweaters it is important to use cool water and agitate garment by hand.

Silk-The silk fabric has more luster and less wrinkling when softening agents are used. If you have wetcleaned a silk using no softening agent you will often get a dry and lusterless fabric. Softening agents add luster and also reduces wrinkling, making it easier to press.

Cotton-A cotton fabric will be softer and be easier to press when softening agents are used. Softening agents should not be used on fabrics that require sizing.

Polyester-Softening agents reduce static electricity and gives more luster to the fabric. It does not help much in reducing finishing.

Glued on Trimming-I would avoid softening agents when fabrics have glued on trimming. Softening agents often loosen the adhesive binder which holds the trimming.

Quilted Fabrics-Softening agents should not be used on quilted fabrics. Softening agents tend to stay with the fabric causing streaks and swales.

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Pile Fabric-The softening agents help give a softer pile fabric with additional luster.

HOW TO USE SOFTENING AGENTS

Softening agents are not compatible with anionic detergents. They cancel out the cleaning action of these detergents. Softening agents are used in the rinse cycle with warm water. Even if you use a detergent with a built in softening agent additional product should be added to the rinse cycle. They work best if they do not receive a second rinse. After garments are wetcleaned with a softening agent they need a drying cycle to activate the properties of the softening agent. The drying cycle also helps remove wrinkles from the fabric. The drying cycle does not mean that the fabric is totally dry. They should be dried until 90% dry, which means that the seams are slightly damp. On wools the garments are dried no more than 3 minutes. A short drying cycle does not shrink the wool but simply activates the softening agent, making it more supple with better hand. If garments are simply hung up after wetcleaning it will result in a stiff and wrinkled condition.

STRETCHING SHRUNKEN WOOLS

If wools have shrunk they can often be stretched by soaking the garment for 15 minutes in warm water mixed with concentrated softening agent. The garment is then extracted and subjected to a short drying cycle (2 minutes). Stretching can then be attempted.