

## Next Performance Days fair to focus on 'Nothing to Waste'

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Pic: Performance Days

Performance Days, a fabric fair, has announced that finite resources and endless mountains of rubbish set the tone of its upcoming 25th edition. Closing the loop means nothing is wasted, not even time, as recycled clothing gets recycled again and again. The organisers are planning expert discussion panels to present the facts as well as visions for future.

The organisers suggested that one can expect the corresponding displays of sustainable materials, chosen by the Performance forum jury. Look for materials such as fibres from recycled PET bottles, recyclable mono-component materials or blends and shirts that decompose to biomass in a "Cradle-to-Cradle" approach.

"Nothing to Waste - Closing the Loop" is open to the public at the Messe München fairgrounds and as a digital fair online starting on December 9-10, 2020. The Performance Days trade fair has chosen a new focus topic that concerns not only its own industry. The textile industry has long

been achieving more efficient production by recycling its own waste products and using recycled materials from outside the industry, for example, PET-bottles. Nevertheless, textiles exist alongside glass, paper, metal and plastics as a separate branch of waste management. Despite ambitious efforts at recycling by the waste and textile industries, the efficient use of textile waste as a resource remains a challenge. Compounding this challenge are the difficulties caused by a global world: production, consumers, and disposal sites are miles apart, shared expert knowledge about the other industries is lacking and international standards and political support are nearly non-existent.

Information from the federal office for the environment shows that 0.8 per cent of the oil produced is used in the textile industry for the production of new textiles. But the costly processing chain of this finite resource ends all too quickly in waste. A Greenpeace survey reveals outdated fashions or clothing of worn quality is thrown away within three years, only to land in the trash dumpsters. The European Environmental Agency estimates that 5.8 million tons of used textiles are discarded every year and either incinerated, used for landfill or taken to mechanical-biological sewage treatment plants. Even if used clothing is collected by state or private companies, in many cases it cannot be sold (as second hand), donated, or recycled (into rags or insulating material). In the best case scenario, it is incinerated and converted to thermal energy.

From an economic and environmental perspective, the term recycling refers to waste-free products, waste avoidance, and waste recovery and disposal. In textile industry as it stands, recycling at the end of the product life cycle usually means converting the product into some other product, ie not clothing. This is the "Open-Loop" process. Accordingly, textiles are eventually incinerated, but the amount of energy recovered can vary greatly depending on how efficiently the waste incineration plant works.

Such devaluing of the product to a product with less value than the original product is known as downcycling. However, downcycling is not the only solution: the "closed-loop" approach has the goal of making new clothes out of old ones through recycling. The closed loop for renewable natural resources, for example, can mean that natural fibres used in textiles will end up becoming soil, which is the nutrient for new natural fibres, ie a cradle-to-cradle approach. Synthetic garments similarly require extracting the man-made fibres and reprocessing them to produce another garment.

Rather than thinking about recycling opportunities at the end of the product life cycle, brands can already begin developing closed loop options while in the design phase. Among other things, designing out the waste can reduce the environmental impact of the products. To extend the useful life, consider leasing the materials and/or adding labels with instructions for disposal, repair, or repurposing. And, what about the idea of preparing 100 per cent used textiles that can

be reintroduced into the supply chain as 100 per cent new textiles? Separating the different types of fibre used in blends is complex, cost-intensive, and further complicated when labels are non-existent (or no longer existing) or it is simply not (yet) technically possible. More and more clothing makers and suppliers are trying to avoid mixing fibres and are switching to "mono-materials" or "mono-components." Shirts are easy to make in this way, but if you add buttons, zippers, etc the issue becomes more complex.