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The International Fabricare Institute is a trade association that represents the interest of the drycleaning/laundry industry. IFI provides education, research, legislative representation, and industry specific information through its programs, products, and services. It has approximately 9,000 members in the U.S. and 53 countries worldwide.



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Clothing consumers have rights when things go wrong

What to do when problems come up

Bad experiences can happen: favorite sweaters shrunk to puppy dog size, bleeding and faded colors, a red and white garment turned pink during cleaning and even holes in the fabric can result from regular cleaning. Clothing can be replaced or refunded depending on the nature of the problem and whether the consumer or cleaner followed the recommended care instructions.

Following the Rules

While caveat emptor (let the buyer beware) applies to many purchases in life, you may have some recourse if a garment gets damaged, especially if you followed the care label instructions.

Consumers have the right to a refund or a replacement if following the recommended care label instructions caused damage to an article of clothing, according to the Federal Trade Commission. While exercising those rights, consumers have the power to help the FTC gather information on problems some manufacturers are having.

Although it will take some leg work, getting a replacement should not pose a problem, regardless of whether the clothing was damaged at the cleaners or at home, so long as the person cleaning the garment followed the instructions.

Cleaners may even help their customers get replacements and often have contact informa-

tion for retailers and manufacturers.

"If you followed the washing instructions and your red-and-white shirt is now pink or if your garment was dry cleaned according to the care instructions and is damaged, return it to the retailer and ask for an exchange or refund," says the FTC's web site, www.ftc.gov. The FTC suggests drafting a letter to the manufacturer, and its web site offers a sample letter that simplifies the return and complaint process.

"In your letter, describe the garment and list information from the labels and tags. Estimate how many times you've washed the garment or had it dry cleaned. Include the full name and address of the retailer," the site suggests.

The Big Picture

Sending a copy of your complaint letter to the FTC can also be beneficial. While the FTC cannot act on individual claims, consumer information can indicate a pattern of law violations requiring action by the commission. The FTC is also

interested in knowing about clothing that is purchased without the required care labeling because consumers have a right to know how to clean their clothing without damaging it.

The single most helpful thing consumers can do is submit their name, address and telephone number to the FTC when complaining. ▶



◀ according to Constance Vecellio, an FTC attorney.

“This information is invaluable in the investigation of a particular manufacturer because it enables Commission staff to obtain precise descriptions of garments, and in some cases even pictures of the garments,” Vecellio said. “When we have precise descriptions, we can prove, for example, that there were 10 identical garments that were damaged in cleaning rather than simply 10 garments by the same manufacturer.”

The FTC can be contacted at Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580.

The FTC and the International Fabricare Institute work together to improve clothing quality for consumers. As a service to members and consumers, IFI’s International Textile Analysis

Laboratory investigates damaged garments on a daily basis. The lab’s mission is to find out what went wrong with the garments and share that information with members, in the interest of determining the cause of the problem and preventing future problems. The root of the problem can be consumer misuse, manufacturing flaws or a drycleaning error. Results from lab analysis are also compiled and sub-

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- Federal Trade Commission.

mitted to the FTC each month. “Repeat offenders” are detected using IFI’s comprehensive database, often prompting regulatory action against manufacturers.

In early 1999, for example, the FTC negotiated a \$300,000 civil penalty as part of a care label violation settlement with Tommy Hilfiger. Due in part to data supplied by IFI, the FTC determined that the company had violated the care label rule because too many shirts were being damaged by bleeding and fading during cleaning following the care label instructions.

Shortly thereafter, Tommy Hilfiger joined with IFI and began a garment program designed to provide information to the manufacturer and get replacements to customers. In the agreement, IFI member cleaners can submit garments to IFI’s International Textile Analysis Laboratory for damage analysis. After ITAL analyzes the garment the results are recorded in the IFI database and the garment is forwarded to Tommy Hilfiger for replacement.

The member cleaner receives a new shirt to give to the customer and IFI sends a copy of the garment report to the IFI

cleaner and a Hilfiger representative.

IFI and the FTC are solving problems in the clothing manufacturing world every day, but when consumers discover an article of clothing was damaged as a result of following care label instructions, tempers may flare. Often, the consumer can exchange the garment at the retailer and the problem is solved on that level. In a broader sense, reporting the experience to the FTC helps the commission acquire data on different types of clothing damage, spot trends and determine if the matter is worthy of deeper investigation.

No Recourse

The return policies and defenses of the FTC only apply to consumers who followed the care label instructions and ended up with damaged clothing. Not following the tag’s instructions and causing damage is the fault of the consumer.

According to the Care Label Rule, the manufacturer is only required to present the consumer with one acceptable method of cleaning the garment regardless of how many other safe methods could be used. Furthermore, the label does not have to warn about unsafe cleaning methods. For example, clothing labeled “dryclean” may not clean well at all in a home washing machine.

Care instructions apply to all permanently attached parts of the garment, such as buttons, lining or decorative trim. Labels that say “Dry Clean Only, Exclusive of Decorative Trim” do not meet legal standards because they don’t explain that the trim must be removed before the garment is cleaned, or give a separate care method for the trim.

In addition, care labels must list any necessary warnings about a recommended cleaning method. For example, the label must say whether any step of the care method—washing, bleaching, drying, ironing or drycleaning—could harm the garment, or other items cleaned with it.

If you have questions about how to interpret a care label or how best to care for your clothes, consult your professional drycleaner. □

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Q How do you remove deodorant and antiperspirant residue?

A Many people do not realize that prolonged contact with deodorants and antiperspirants may cause permanent damage to clothing. Combined with the effects of perspiration, the damage can be extensive. The most frequent damage is caused by overuse of these products, or infrequent cleanings. This leads to the buildup of a stiff, caked-up residue or to fabric damage.

To prevent chemical damage, do not overuse the product and allow it to dry before dressing. Wear a dress shield with silk garments.

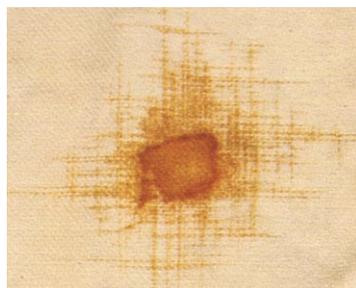
To remove the residue on washable garments, wash them as soon as possible after wear in the hottest water safe for the fabric. Soaking in a detergent containing enzymes or an enzyme presoak may be necessary. If the stain remains, try using three percent hydrogen peroxide or chlorine bleach, according to fiber type or care label instructions. Before using, test for colorfastness.

Q How should I clean my rayon garments?

A First we must remember that rayon is a manufactured fiber composed of regenerated cellulose derived from wood pulp or cotton linters. It is absorbent and comfortable to wear. There are different forms of the fiber known as rayon, viscose, cuprammonium, high-wet modulus and lyocel sold as Tencel™.

With the exception of lyocel, rayon is very sensitive to water. Many dyes applied to rayon are not colorfast and will bleed or migrate upon contact with moisture. In addition, manufacturers often add sizing to rayon in order to achieve a desired body or drape. Some sizings are water-soluble, and washing will distort the shape of the garment. Drycleaning is recommended for most rayon garments. Although substantially similar in chemical composition to rayon, lyocel can be either drycleaned or washed. However, when caring for garments made of lyocel it is important to follow the care instructions carefully. If a garment made of lyocel is washed when it should have been drycleaned, it may result in excessive shrinkage and a wrinkled appearance.

Q I received my pants at the cleaners and a stain mysteriously became more apparent. What happened?



A You could have an oil stain on your pants. Oil stains, from edible vegetable or cooking oils and mayonnaise can be difficult to identify, since they can become almost any color after oxidation. Stains from such oils are often color-

less when they first wet the fabric, but will absorb oxygen from the air (oxidize) and discolor over time. After contact with a fabric, an oil stain usually forms small crosses as it spreads out in all directions along individual yarns.

The stains become more apparent after being subjected to the atmosphere or heat for some time. Heat, such as that used in pressing clothing, causes a faster oxidation of the oil and a more apparent stain.

The oil stains can usually be removed with professional cleaning if they are taken to a cleaner promptly. It is important to act fast because once the oily substance oxidizes it is extremely difficult and many times impossible to remove the stain.

In these cases the owner of the garment is responsible for the stain since the original staining substance contacted the garment during use. Also, if the stained item had been taken to a cleaner immediately, chances are that the oil would not have had time to oxidize and become permanently set in the fabric.

Even after the oil oxidizes and turns colors, professional cleaners may be able to remove the stain or reduce it to an acceptable condition, although there is no guarantee.

Q My cleaner returned my jacket to me and ever since my skin has been itchy. Why is this happening?

A Some people are sensitive or allergic to certain fibers, dyes or finishes present on a fabric from manufacture. Sensitivities can vary from the season of the year or with the health of the individual. If the garment in question is several years old, you may have developed a sensitivity to the fiber. If the garment is new, there may be a finish on the item that is causing the unpleasant reaction.

An IFI member cleaner could send the jacket in question to the International Textile Analysis Lab for analysis. The fabric can be tested for the presence of acid or alkaline residues. Drycleaning solvent is neutral. Indicators can also detect the presence of formaldehyde residues that sometimes remain on the fabric from manufacture and can be the cause of skin irritation.

Q I had my sport coat cleaned and several of the yarns pulled out during cleaning. These yarns are thicker than the rest of the yarns and are soft. What happened to my jacket?

A Manufacturers have started to use the soft, fuzzy chenille yarns in men's clothes. The chenille yarns, which are not securely or tightly woven into the fabric, pull out, resulting in a snagged appearance. This damage may have originated from rubbing and abrasion in use, and will be further aggravated by the necessary agitation in cleaning. The damage may become apparent after short periods of use and cleaning or progress over several wearings and cleanings.

New Content on IFI Web Site Helps Consumers

Looking for tips and hints on how to get chocolate out of that new white blouse? Trying to find a local drycleaner in your area? Ever wonder what drycleaning is and how it differs from regular washing? Trying to find a cleaner to use while on a business trip? Wondering how to bring up that disagreement you had with your cleaner last month? The International Fabricare Institute's web site, www.ifi.org, can answer all these questions and more.

The IFI site has been completely revamped with new content added especially for consumers. For instance, users can locate cleaners in their area, contact IFI experts and read current news, as well as find web site links to drycleaning establishments registered with IFI and more.

Following is a look at some of the new consumer features offered on the new-look [ifi.org](http://www.ifi.org).

Fabric Care Tips and Hints

This area includes a fabric care dictionary and offers a list of consumer brochures produced by IFI.

Answers to many commonly asked questions about stain removal and garment care are readily available in the Frequently Asked Questions department. If the information you seek isn't on the site, you can choose to submit a question to one of IFI's experts who can have an answer back to you in about 24 hours.

What is Drycleaning?

Drycleaning dates back to ancient times, probably beginning with the advent of textile clothing itself. The ruins of Pompeii gives a record of a highly developed trade of "fullers" who were professional clothes cleaners. Lye and ammonia were used in early laundering, and a type of clay known as "fuller's earth" was used to absorb soils and grease from clothing too delicate for laundering.

There are many stories about the origin of drycleaning, all centering on a surprise discovery when a petroleum-type fluid was accidentally spilled on a greasy fabric. It

quickly evaporated and the stains were miraculously removed. The firm of Jolly-Belin, which opened in Paris in the 1840s, is credited as the first drycleaning firm.

Finding a Good Cleaner

Going out of town on business? Going to need a cleaner while you're there? Never fear, IFI's cleaner locator can help you find certified IFI member cleaners who hold themselves to the highest standard in the drycleaning industry.

Members of IFI, as do members of any trade association, have an advantage over others in their profession. IFI provides its members with quality information and knowledge about the cleaning industry. Members are educated and kept up to date on the latest industry information, cleaning techniques, solutions for problem garments, finishing procedures, new regulations and technical operating information through IFI's publications and educational resources.

Settling a Disagreement with Your Cleaner

What happens when you pick up your suit and there's a big iron spot on the back, or a broken button? This section covers cleaner responsibility and covers some of the laws enforced by the Federal Trade Commission.

Damage that occurs during the drycleaning process may stem from the failure of a component part to be drycleanable or from the circumstances of use. Regardless, drycleaning customers need to know who is responsible for damaged items and what recourse they have to remedy the situation.

Apparel and Industry Related Contacts

This section offers links to the Better Business Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission, groups who work with the fabricare industry on consumer-related issues.

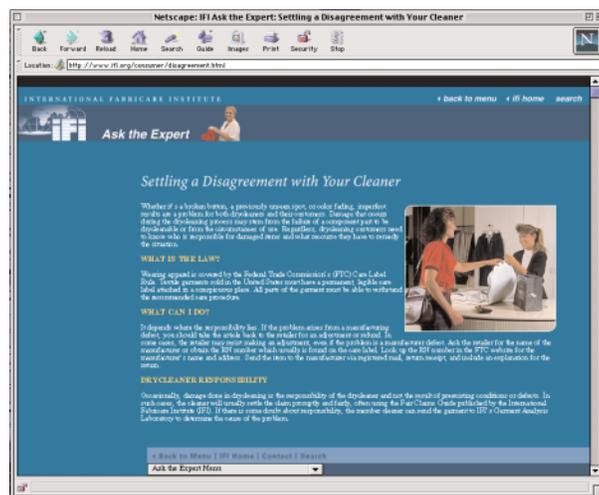
Users can also connect to drycleaners' business sites via www.ifi.org. □



IFI's new opening page.



Finding a good cleaner.



Settling a disagreement with your cleaner.