

## **Myth-busting**

### **The half-truths, mistruths and untruths about leather**

Leather has been a feature of human existence since before records began, when ancient people discovered various methods of preserving animal skins for use as clothing, shelter, footwear and even as floats and rafts. Even now, leather is a feature of our daily lives in our footwear, upholstery and of course our range of products. It has a number of unexpected applications such as its use in oil seals in submarine and aeroplane engines and prosthetic limbs

#### **The leather industry is responsible for the death of millions of animals**

Put bluntly no meat no leather. Hides and skins, produced as a by-product of the farming of livestock for meat and milk for human consumption, account for over 99% of the raw material used by the leather industry. The hide or the skin of the animal accounts for less than 10% of the animal's value and considerably less when milk production is taken into account. If the raw material was not converted into leather, the meat and dairy industries would have millions of tonnes of waste to dispose of every year. Leather manufacture turns this waste into a beautiful and sustainable product- not one of the animals involved was reared for its skin

#### **Leather damages the environment**

As leather manufacturers we strive to produce in the most sustainable way. Technologies such as reverse osmosis for the treatment of effluent and gasification, for the conversion of solid wastes into energy are being applied within our tanneries to help make leather with the lowest carbon footprint. New developments include utilizing solar powered hot water to meet thermal energy requirements. And it cannot be forgotten that, unlike, many industries, leather manufacture utilises a sustainable raw material that would otherwise be wasted.

#### **Leather causes cancer**

The allegation that leather causes cancer usually arises from the use of chromium salts to tan material but what is often overlooked is the difference between chromium compounds. Leather manufacture uses a chromium 111 salt which is not carcinogenic and has the toxicity comparable to table salt. Chromium is an essential nutrient and supplements can be found in health food products around the world.

#### **Leather manufacture involves the use of dangerous chemicals**

Almost every industry in the world uses dangerous chemicals in some form during the manufacturing process. However, we are subject to rigorous regulation, in fact far greater testing than other applications. Depending on the standard applied, the limits for formaldehyde and orthophenylphenol are typically 20-30 mg/kg. Yet both these chemicals are used in cosmetics with limit values 1000 and 2000mg/kg along with oral mouthwashes which may contain up to 1000mg/kg of formaldehyde. It seems perverse that an industry should be accused of flagrantly using dangerous chemicals when those same chemicals attract no attention when present, at much higher concentrations, in other household products.

## Leather has a big carbon footprint

DFTER the European Commission's in-depth product category footprint evaluation for leather the carbon footprint carry over from farm has been restricted to 0.42%. The agreement has meant that leather has a carbon footprint lower to synthetic materials.

# The Leather Business

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