



ICT



Global Leather Coordinating Committee

Policy Statement

“FlyLeather” – NIKE’s new footwear line would contravene labelling legislation in a number of major markets

The Global Leather Coordination Committee (GLCC), which brings together the three international Leather organisations (International Council of Tanners – ICT, International Council of Hides, Skins and Leather Traders Associations – ICHSLTA, International Union of Leather Chemists and Technologists Societies - IULTCS) welcomes the development of sustainable products but is concerned to ensure the correct labelling of leather and leather products and, in particular, products that may only look like leather.

GLCC welcomes any initiative that improves the environmental footprint of leather. Making profitable use of otherwise unusable leather splits, shavings and trimmings in new market applications is a positive development. With its footwear material made of 50% recycled leather fibres, Nike helps the tanning industry to improve its environmental performance by reducing the amount of leather by-products or waste and contributes to the circular economy.

But GLCC also unequivocally backs the protection of the term leather from inappropriate use. This is an important way to ensure customer fidelity and consumer loyalty. The Nike footwear material made of 50% of recombined leather fibres is not “leather”. It is not in the public interest to make people believe that a composite or man-made material can be leather. There is a clear definition of what is and isn’t leather – to call other materials “leather” simply creates confusion through the marketing chain, deceives consumers and damages business.

The term “FlyLeather” is, moreover, illegal in several important consumer markets where legislation or standards prevent consumers from deceptive commercial practices and protect the leather industry from those who would seek to “free ride” on its heritage.

In the EU, since 1994, the Footwear Labelling Directive has set the disclosure rules that govern the marketing of shoes in the internal market. Under this Directive, Nike “Flyleather” would not qualify to be labelled as leather or as coated leather, but as a synthetic material. In addition, the European Commission’s Guidance on Unfair Commercial Practices bans terms such as ecoleather or textile-leather as deceptive. “Flyleather” falls into this category.

The EU Footwear labelling rules have been replicated all over the world and certain National regulations additionally protect the term “Leather” from marketing abuses.

In Brazil, for example, a federal law establishes that the word “leather” can only be used when referring to products made 100% of animal skin.

More specifically, in the European terminology standard EN 15987 one can read under section 4.4.1: “leather fibre board, bonded leather fibre, recycled leather fibre and similar terms: material where tanned hides or skins are disintegrated mechanically and/or chemically into fibrous particles, small pieces or powders and then, with or without the combination of chemical binding agent, are made into sheets Note 1 to entry: If there is any other component apart from leather fibre, binding material and leather auxiliaries, then this should be declared as part of the description.

Note 2 to entry: The minimum amount of 50 % in weight of dry leather is needed to use the term leather fibre board.

Note 3 to entry: The term “leather” is only to be used for material with the original fibrous structure intact as defined under 4.1.1.:

“4.1.1. leather

hide or skin with its original fibrous structure more or less intact, tanned to be imputrescible, where the hair or wool may or may not have been removed, whether or not the hide or skin has been split into layers or segmented either before or after tanning and where any surface coating or surface layer, however applied, is not thicker than 0,15 mm”

“Where the material has been disintegrated and reformed in some way, the appropriate generic term is “...X leather fibre”- for example, “ bonded leather fibre,” or “recycled leather fibre.” On this basis, the terms “recycled leather” or “recycling leather” are used incorrectly.”

Furthermore, it is claimed that “FlyLeather” is better than the real thing, both in performance and in its footprint, including that the product uses 90% less water in production, and has a carbon footprint that is 80% lower than leather.

The analysis of environmental footprints is open to interpretation and the detailed methodology used for each assessment is crucial in determining the result. In particular, the definitions of the functional unit, system boundaries and allocation rules, are very important and can lead to significant differences in results. The details of the analysis of “Flyleather” are not available, but the figures suggest that the manufacture of the leather, which comprises more than 50% of the product, has not been included in the calculation. At the same time, no reference is given for the footprint of leather production, which will vary hugely depending on what is or isn’t included in the assessment or who is the producer and where.

GLCC contends that the environmental claims are not valid unless the methodology is transparent. Furthermore, the EU’s Product Environmental Footprint initiative states that comparative assertions between different products should not be made.

In summary, GLCC regrets that Nike exalts the merits and properties of its footwear material by denigrating leather – a well recognised noble material, widely used by Nike itself - reiterates that the term “Flyleather” is illegal in a number of important markets and questions the environmental footprint claims in comparison to leather.

Contact for further information:

Paul Pearson
Secretary – ICT
Email: sec@tannerscouncilict.org