



UL RESPONSIBLE SOURCING

"An Interview with Cynthia Powers, Fisher Found's Facilitating Manager"



UL Consumer and Retail Services (CRS) Responsible Sourcing team would like to thank speakers and guests joining us for UL's 12th Responsible Sourcing summit in Los Angeles on March 1-2, 2017. Speakers from the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, Ropes & Gray LLP, Business for Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI), ICTI CARE, Richline Group, prAna, Textile Exchange, Landesa, BJ's Wholesale Group, Columbia Sportswear, MillerCoors, HP, Eileen Fisher, and the International Labor Affairs Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor gave insights in panels discussing "The Unintended Costs of Regional Responsible Sourcing Issues", "Success Stories – Positive Impacts from Responsible Sourcing Initiatives", "Product Traceability – Approaches That Can Be Applied from Agriculture to Jewelry", "Supply Chain Risk Segmentation – Where to Focus Your Energy" and "How Repair, Reuse, and Recycle Programs Can Enrich Responsible Sourcing Efforts".

If you were unable to join us for this event, UL shares a series of "An Interview With..." conversations with some of our guest speakers. This is our second blog from the event.

"An Interview with Cynthia Powers, Fisher Found's Facilitating Manager"

UL Responsible Sourcing's Jude Mackay spoke with Cynthia Power, Fisher Found's Facilitating Manager, of EILEEN FISHER, at UL's annual Responsible Sourcing Summit recently, in sunny Los Angeles, to discuss the challenges of post-consumer waste in the sustainable apparel sector.

Jude Mackay: Cynthia, we were introduced to one another when planning our "How Repair, Reuse, and Recycle Programs Can Enrich Responsible Sourcing Efforts: exploring innovative ways to address product end-of-life concerns..." panel for UL's annual Responsible Sourcing Summit. We heard the U.S. Department of Labor's International Labor Affairs Bureau speak about the impacts of waste in the international landfill community. Why is this topic so important to you at [Eileen Fisher](#)?

Cynthia Power: Fisher Found, Eileen Fisher's apparel take back program, was started in 2009. At the beginning, we set this up due to a need to find a solution for garments we ourselves no longer wore. One Eileen Fisher store manager said, 'What's in our closets? I have lots of beautiful, perfectly good clothing I no longer wear - I wonder if our customers do to?' She started the program in her store and it has grown every year since. When it first started, it wasn't about the environment, it was just common sense that we could give our unused clothes new lives. We put so much energy and resources into the clothing in the first place: we have always used the highest quality fabrics and we found out how well they held up over time. At the beginning, we didn't have a strategy because we had no idea how big it would become.



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Jude Mackay: Eileen Fisher is a small, niche, and high quality brand, so how did you scale your idea?

Cynthia Power: We committed to reject no item from the outset. To date, we've taken back 750,000 garments in 3 main categories: Reworn (like-new in perfect condition), Renewed (needs a small mend), and Remade (is very damaged and will be taken apart to make something new). We sell all three categories in select stores and in pop-up sales. In 2016 alone, we took back 170,000 garments. We have 2 recycling facilities: one in Irvington, NY, and one in Seattle, WA. Our "Reworn" offering is the most scaled part of the program: 70,000 of the 2016 garments incoming were cleaned and resold.

Jude Mackay: What were the challenges in establishing this program?

Cynthia Power: Storage, for one! We had no idea how popular this would be, and had no projection of how this would grow. Eileen Fisher makes 5 million garments a year, and our quality is high, so we did not know how many would be returned for processing. Anything we cannot resell (about half of what we get back), we renew or remake in our recycling centers and Tiny Factory.

Jude Mackay: Is there any product your program can't handle?

Cynthia Power: Due to the high percentage of natural fibers in our clothing, we have a lot of options to reuse our materials. We remake a lot of knitted cashmere, woven linen, and knitted wool, but some fibers like viscose and blends are a challenge to remake, so we are doing constant R+D and analysis on all fabrics to see how we can reuse them. We are working with partners in mechanical and chemical recycling, but the technology isn't quite there yet. We share this R+D is with our internal design teams so they understand which raw materials can be easily reused in the future. This way, they can design with reuse in mind. It's important to understand how our garments get holes or stains during use and why our customers would give them back to us. We are committed to design for longevity.

Jude Mackay: Are there any unintended consequences of the Fisher Found program?

Cynthia Power: Yes, we have a new take-back supply chain structure and a new labor force who staff our recycling and remanufacturing centers. Since 2009, these teams have grown to employ 40 people. The supply chain structure becomes domestic rather than overseas. Our new garments are made in China, Italy, Japan and the USA: this model changes to USA entirely for Reworn, Renewed + Remade production.



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Jude Mackay: How will you scale this in the future?

Cynthia Power: We are currently launching our strategy to build on the core function of Fisher Found. We need to formalize this program as part of Eileen Fisher, Inc. We have a new revenue stream from this business model, but no data to analyze yet. What we value today is changing all the time, so we need to be flexible, too. Innovation is important to be scaled: for example, we are working with new partners who have the technology to process cellulosic materials into pulp to turn back into fiber, which is just taking off in the industry. In the future, we'd like to see our fibers, like cotton, processed back into clothing (becoming recycled cotton) rather than using virgin fibers from a farm. Developing our circular business model is the ultimate goal.

Jude Mackay: Do you have any message for our audience?

Cynthia Power: Yes, please be mindful of your purchases: buy high quality garments first or second hand. Consumers have power in how they spend their money, so try to shop brands that care for our people and planet (like Patagonia!). Also, come visit our Fisher Found Recycling Center + Factory in Irvington, New York: we're open for tours! We will also be hosting a series of events showcasing Fisher Found in Eileen Fisher stores in late April, so look to see if there's one near you by [clicking here](#).

Lastly, after 4/20, check out our new [re-commerce site](#), where you can buy Reworn Eileen Fisher clothing online.

About Cynthia:

Cynthia Power is the Facilitating Manager of Fisher Found, EILEEN FISHER's clothing take back program founded in 2009. Every garment we take back is either resold, donated or remanufactured, helping EILEEN FISHER get closer and closer to becoming a truly circular company. Cynthia's vision is to give every EILEEN FISHER garment a first, second and third life, ultimately recycling it and causing no harm. Cynthia has been with EILEEN FISHER for 9 years and attended Scripps College.

To read UL's 2017 Responsible Sourcing Summit speaker interview with Annukka Dickens, HP, please [click here](#). To read the interview with Rachel Lincoln, prAna, please [click here](#).

About UL Responsible Sourcing:

UL is a leading global provider of responsible sourcing auditing and advisory services, which include supply chain monitoring, research, program development, and training. UL's Responsible Sourcing team has the global footprint to provide services in several countries.

For more information on all the ways you can rely on UL to help you manage sourcing risk, contact RSinfo@ul.com