



## Levi Strauss - leading a worldwide ban on sandblasting

Sandblasting is used to give jeans and denim a distressed look but without proper controls workers can contract fatal lung disorders, and Levi Strauss is leading the way for a worldwide ban

- Simon Beavis for the [Guardian Professional Network](#)
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[Levi Strauss - long-listed for the Guardian Sustainable Business social impact award.](#)

If you're wearing a new pair of worn-looking jeans, there's a good chance they've been blasted with sand to give them that perfect distressed look.

Sandblasting is just one of the techniques used in the apparel industry to make denim and other fabrics look fashionably faded.

Done under the right conditions, this can be a perfectly safe process. Done with inadequate health and safety protections in place, workers can be exposed to hazardous crystalline silica and the threat of contracting fatal lung disorders, such as silicosis.

Levi Strauss & Co has safely used sandblasting in the past with proper controls in place to protect workers in its supplier factories.

But this is by no means common practice. Sandblasting is still widely done in factories without adequate safety controls, particularly in counterfeit operations.



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Realizing that it would be difficult to enforce proper safety standards across the world, Levi Strauss and fashion retailer, H&M, decided the best way to protect workers was to push for a total worldwide ban on sandblasting. In September 2010 they both announced they would end sandblasting in their own supply chains.

The group is policing its own ban using enforcement and factory checks. A team of factory assessors, based close to suppliers around the world, has been employed. They conduct regular inspections to make sure factories are complying with the ban, now included in Levi Strauss' terms of engagement.

The terms were drawn up in 1991 to make sure all suppliers met a range of standards, including health and safety, child labour and freedom of association. Pioneering at the time, such standards are now commonplace in the industry.

The challenge now is to persuade others in the industry to join the ban so that sandblasting can eventually be eliminated.