

IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE OF NATURAL FUR PRODUCTION

The International Fur Trade Federation (IFTF) commissioned DSS Management Consultants Inc. to produce an independent Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) to enable the IFTF and its members to better understand the environmental impacts associated with each stage of fur production. The results were announced in Oct 2012. This summary has been drafted to provide non-technical readers with a good understanding and a proper interpretation of those results.

The IFTF LCA involved a comparison with fake fur products, largely in response to claims that natural fur was not as "environmentally friendly." Such claims should always be based on independent and scientifically sound data. The results have revealed a number of environmental advantages of natural fur when compared to fake fur. In addition, along with all responsible industries, IFTF sought ways and means to improve the environmental footprint of fur production. The findings of this report provide a solid foundation for the fur industry to identify opportunities to improve its environmental performance by increasing its positive contributions to environmental quality and by preventing or reducing its demand on the environment. This LCA reveals many opportunities for future improvement through all stages of the life cycle of natural fur.

This LCA has been conducted in accordance with the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) LCA standard and has been subjected to peer review. The fur industry is currently engaged in initiating an environmental management program, an important step being to identify and implement environmental good management practices throughout the fur life cycle. Initial emphasis is being placed on fur farming and processing.

Outcomes: Environmental Advantages of Natural Fur

- Natural fur is a highly durable product that holds its value for decades. The opposite is true for fake fur. As a result, natural fur garments may be used for 30 or more years. On the other hand the useful life of a fake fur coat is often less than 10 years. The result is greater environmental impacts are required to produce the amount of fake fur equivalent to long-lasting natural fur. As well, given the shorter useful life, fake fur results in considerably more solid waste.
- Natural fur garments are often disassembled and the fur reused in new garments reducing the demand for production of new fur and yielding significant environmental benefits.
- Natural fur is produced using byproducts from waste. Productive use of this waste reduces the impact on the environment and results in more efficient use of materials harvested from the environment.
- Natural fur yields environment benefits when the wastes from fur farms are managed properly. These benefits include the production of biogas and organically derived fertilizers that replace high-energy fertilizers produced using chemical processes and mining.

- Over the life-cycle of a natural and a fake fur coat, a fake fur coat results in about 20% greater consumption of non-renewable energy (e.g., oil, gas) and 17% more greenhouse gas emissions which are known to contribute to climate change.

Making Natural Fur Better

The environmental performance of natural fur can be made even better. The results of this LCA provide guidance as to where the greatest gains in environmental performance can be realized. Some areas that are proposed to be targeted are:

- Manure and other wastes from fur farms can provide environmental benefits if managed well. However, these wastes can result in undesirable air and water emissions. By ensuring good management practices are used for waste management, the fur industry can assure consumers that natural fur production will yield the greatest environmental benefits possible.
- A major source of apparent environmental demand is associated with centralized summer storage of natural fur garments. The primary source of environmental demand associated with storage is passenger car use transporting fur garments to and from centralized storage facilities. Encouraging natural fur owners to reduce passenger car use (e.g., by planning trips to serve as many purposes as practical) will increase significantly the environmental performance of natural fur.
- The reduction during the fur processing stage of the use of any chemical that may result in the consumption of scarce resources and produce difficult-to-manage wastes will consequentially reduce the environmental demands of producing natural fur garments.

About DSS Management

Decision Support Systems (DSS) Management Consultants Inc specializes in applying the latest in natural, social and management science to improving environmental performance and sustainability. They specialise in developing and applying integrated decision support systems to assist with environmental policy analysis and natural resource management decisions. Consulting and research services are provided to private and public organizations, particularly those faced with making challenging and significant decisions involving economic, environmental, engineering, social and legal elements; their goal is to assist decision makers to make better decisions when faced with complex, multifaceted environmental and natural resource management issues.

DSS has been involved in environmental accounting and sustainability analysis for over 35 years. Life cycle analysis is one of many tools and techniques used to inform our clients of the environmental consequences of their activities and to provide advice as to how their environmental performance can be improved.

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