

# Care Labels and Your Clothes



**Pam Brown**

Extension Specialist — Consumer Science  
The Texas A&M University System

**Y**our favorite sweater shrank, your new pants puckered, and the colors in your designer shirt ran. You're furious.

Don't toss the clothes out just yet. If you followed the cleaning instructions on the care labels, you can return the garments and ask the retailer for an exchange or a refund.



Under the Federal Trade Commission's Care Labeling Rule, manufacturers must tag their clothing with at least one safe cleaning method. Garments sold without a care label—or with inaccurate cleaning instructions—may violate the Rule. Beginning July 1, 1997, manufacturers may use certain care symbols in place of words on labels. To help consumers understand the new symbols, the FTC says manufacturers must include written explanations of those symbols on hang tags or elsewhere on garments for the next 18 months.

This brochure explains the new care symbols, and what to do if your clothes end up damaged—even after you've followed the care instructions.

## What Should the Label Say?

In addition to giving one safe cleaning method, care labels must list any necessary warnings about that cleaning method. For example, the label must say whether any step of the care method—washing, bleaching, drying, ironing, or dry cleaning—could harm the garment, or other items cleaned with it.

## Does "Washable" also Mean My Garment Can Be Dry Cleaned?

Not necessarily. Only one method of safe care has to be listed—regardless of how many other safe methods could be used. The label does not have to warn about unsafe cleaning methods. For example, clothing labeled "washable" may not dry clean well.

## What about Trim?

Care instructions apply to all permanently attached parts of the garment, such as buttons, lining or decorative trim. Labels that say "Dry Clean Only, Exclusive of Decorative Trim" do not meet legal standards because they don't explain that the trim must be removed before the garment is cleaned, or give a separate care method for the trim.



## What If I Have Problem

If you followed the washing instructions and your red and white shirt is now pink, or if your garment was dry cleaned according to the care instructions and is damaged, return it to the retailer and ask for an exchange or refund. If the retailer won't cooperate, ask for the manufacturer's name and address, and write to the company.

In your letter, describe the garment and list information from the labels and tags. Estimate how many times

you've washed the garment or had it dry cleaned. Include the full name and address of the retailer, and your own address. Enclose a record of the sale (receipt, cancelled check) and explain how you'd like the manufacturer to respond to your problem, as well as the date by which to respond.

You also can contact the FTC by writing to the address listed under For More Information. Although the FTC can't resolve individual disputes, the information you provide may indicate a pattern of law violations

requiring action by the Commission.

The FTC also would like to know if you've purchased clothing without a care label. Please include the name and address of the retailer and the manufacturer.

### Can I Remove the Label?

Care labels must be attached when you buy clothing. The recommended care could influence your purchasing decision. For example, you may want to avoid "dry clean only" items if

you're concerned about cleaning costs.

Although you can remove a care label, you risk losing important information about the proper care of your garment.

### For More Information

Consumer Response Center  
Federal Trade Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20580  
(202) 326-2222  
TDD (202) 326-2502  
Internet site: [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)



NOTE: The water temperatures listed in the chart are provided as a guideline. Actual water temperatures in the home depend on the washing machine settings (hot, warm, cold), regional water supply temperatures, and water heater settings.

## Clothing Care Symbol Guide

MACHINE WASH CYCLE				WARNING SIGNS
Normal	Permanent Press/ wrinkle resistant	Gentle/delicate	Hand wash	Do not wash
WATER TEMPERATURE				Do not wring
Hot (50°C/120°F)	Warm (40°C/105°F)	Cold/cool (30°C/85°F)		
BLEACH SYMBOLS			WARNING SIGNS	
Any bleach (when needed)	Only non-chlorine bleach (when needed)		Do not bleach	
TUMBLE DRY CYCLE				WARNING SIGNS
Dry	Normal	Permanent Press/ wrinkle resistant	Gentle/delicate	Do not tumble dry
HEAT SETTING				Do not dry (used with do not wash)
High	Medium	Low	No heat/air	
SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS				
Line dry/hang to dry	Drip dry	Dry flat	In the shade	
IRON — DRY OR STEAM				WARNING SIGNS
Iron	High	Medium	Low	Do not iron
				No steam
DRYCLEAN — NORMAL CYCLE				WARNING SIGNS
Dryclean	Any solvent	Any solvent except trichloroethylene	Petroleum solvent only	Do not dryclean
PROFESSIONALLY DRYCLEAN				
Reduce moisture	Short cycle	No steam finishing	Low heat	

Adapted from a publication of the Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age or national origin.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Zerle L. Carpenter, Director, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

5M-8-97, New

CLO