

# Södra's position on textiles



## The forest: Key to a renewable and circular textile industry

For generations, wood and pulp solutions have helped build our society. Today we continue to refine these products of the forest, but at the same time we keep discovering new, exciting uses for the wonderful renewable raw material that is wood. Building systems, biomethanol and textile pulp are just a few examples. We use every part of every tree to create the greatest benefits for everyone.

As we refine and develop the forest's products for a more sustainable society, we occasionally encounter issues and challenges where we see a need for change. In this summary, we highlight the main issues and needs we see to contribute even more to the textile industry's green transition.

### The textile industry must change

By 2050, the need for new textile fibres is expected to more than double. Today's textile industry is one of the most resource-intensive and polluting industries in the world and depends primarily on fossil-based synthetic fibres and water-intensive cotton. Only a small percentage of the world's textile fibres are based on raw materials from the forest and only a fraction of all the millions of tonnes of textile waste is recycled. Many Swedish fashion companies have high sustainability goals and long-term ambitions to create renewable and circular textiles. Meeting these goals will require renewable and circular raw materials that are not fossil-based. Replacing some of the fossil raw material with renewable raw material from the forest will have the added advantage that the

renewable material also binds carbon dioxide as it grows. Södra wants to be involved and to contribute to the textile industry's transition journey.

### Textiles from wood pulp

Our textile pulp is a raw material for the textile industry. It is used to make viscose, lyocell and modal, among other products. It is mainly made from birch, beech and aspen, which generates a demand for pulp from hardwood trees. More deciduous trees mean more mixed forests which increases forest diversity. Thanks to the knowledge Södra has built up about textile pulp, we can now recycle blended fabrics, another solution that contributes to increased circularity for the textile industry. Our textile pulp is supplied with a Chain of Custody certificate, which means that the wood raw material comes from

responsible forestry and controlled origin.

It is approved for use in the production of eco-labelled products in accordance with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and the EU Ecolabel.

Södra's OnceMore® is a unique process in which recycled textiles are combined with wood pulp from our members' wood, a solution that contributes to renewable and circular textiles. We have developed one of the world's first large-scale processes for the chemical recycling of textile waste containing blended materials. To certify the recycled content of OnceMore® pulp, we use the Recycled Claim Standard (RCS). Textile waste that passes this certification comes from waste from textile manufacturing (post-industrial) and textiles that cannot be reused (post-consumer).



Certifications that work in an international context are important. They set requirements and ensure quality, but it's also about creating a high level of credibility and transparency in the value chain for renewable and circular textiles.

### **Textile waste can become much more**

Today, in Sweden there is no system to collect textile waste separately from other waste. Households mainly sort textiles for the purpose of selling them second hand and much of the other textiles that could be recycled end up in incineration and in landfill. From 1 January 2025, all EU member states must collect textiles separately, according to the revised Waste Framework Directive.

Södra's chemical recycling of textiles is a solution to the challenge of less than 1 per cent of textiles being fiber to fiber recycled. The fact that we can also recycle blended textiles, which

make up a large part of the world's textile production, makes Södra's recycling method groundbreaking.

In our process, cotton is separated from polyester. The polyester is currently used for energy recovery and thus contributes negatively to Södra's climate impact. We pay emission allowances for polyester as there is currently no technology to make it circular for anything other than energy recovery, even though we did not put the polyester on the market.

The political debate on textiles tends to focus one-sidedly on reuse in order to achieve a more circular textile industry. Reuse is good, but it is only part of the solution; political solutions must also include recycling and sorting. Above all, how textiles are sorted really matters.

Södra's recycling process focuses on textiles that cannot be used again. To be able to sort for recycling, we

need textiles sorted based on fibre content, but also textiles sorted by colour and dyeing technology. Here, textiles need more reliable labelling and better technology so we can read their fibre content. In the future, digital labeling will be important as it will be able to contain information about environmental performance, materials, chemical composition, product images, country of manufacture, care instructions, etc., and enable reading in a large-scale automatic sorting facility.

The need to recycle textiles will increase, as it will not be possible to reuse all of them. With a future ban on the incineration of textiles, the waste stream will increase. It is important to think about renewable material choice and material composition already at the design stage to increase the possibility of a renewable and circular textile industry.

## **Where do we go from here?**

Södra wants to see the policy instruments for textiles broadened and focus on more steps in the value chain from renewable raw material to textile product and from waste to textile product. This work needs to take place both in Sweden and in the EU. Below are some of the initiatives we consider to be priorities:

### **In Sweden:**

- The public sector need to take the lead by setting requirements for sustainable textiles in public procurement.
- Incentives must be created to use sustainable textiles in the production of new textile materials.
- Swedish universities should place greater emphasis on renewable materials and circular design in relevant education.
- A government inquiry should be appointed to compile the results of existing investigations and review the possibility of more concrete measures and instruments that promote sustainable textiles.
- The Government, in its national interpretation of future producer responsibility, should harmonize with the member states of the EU.

### **In the EU:**

- The EU should define and harmonize from a global perspective what is meant by sustainable textile and circular textile.
- The EU should develop a standard, such as the standard for Paper for recycling EN643, European voluntary standards through CEPI, in order to be able to sort textiles efficiently and to achieve a uniform fraction system in Europe.
- The EU should introduce a harmonised producer responsibility for the internal market.
- The EU should launch systems for transparency and traceability through certifications that are possible to implement in a global value chain.
- Performance requirements for textiles should be based on the quality rather than quantity of collected data with as much data being collected as possible.
- Regulatory compliance must be significantly improved in textile labelling if the legislation is to have the intended effect.
- Until digital markings are in circulation, the physical labelling of fibre content needs to be better and clearer.

\* also called dissolving pulp