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<http://consumersmarts.ivillage.com/home/archives/2007/03/faux-real-or-dog-fur.html>

Faux? Real? Or dog fur?

Animal activist or not...a gal wants to know what she's wearing. With the chill of winter still in the air, it may be time to check the fur trim on your jacket. Coats sold as "faux" fur may not be; jackets sold as "Asiatic Raccoon" may not be the raccoon as you know it.

The Humane Society of the U.S. did a little undercover winter coat shopping. What they found may disgust you. They had 25 fur trimmed coats tested at a German lab. The coats ranged in price from budget to high end. Many were top designers. The Humane Society claims they found coats made out of "Raccoon dogs." Yes, dogs! The animal activists showed me some undercover footage taken in China that was almost too hard to watch. Animals kept in crates and skinned alive. They point to a particular animal that looks like a raccoon but the Society says is canine. Most Americans would shudder to know that the fur collar they are donning is made from man's best friend. The fur trade disagrees. They say "Asiatic Raccoons" are not from the canine family but rather a breed unto themselves. Asiatic raccoon is permitted to be imported into the United States.

When the Humane Society notified designers and retailers of their findings, some were appalled and refunded customer's money, others defended their use of the fur. Nordstroms.com sold "Joie" coats that were advertised as "faux." They conducted their own independent testing and their tests conclude the fur is NOT from a domestic dog but rather from a coyote which is a legal fur. The Humane Society says it was "domestic dog fur." Nordstroms.com admitted the fur was not "faux" and offered its customer a full refund.

When JC Penney was informed, they pulled the coats from the racks and then put them back on with the labels inked out. The Humane Society is filing a petition with the FTC against the giant retailer for deceiving its customers. JC Penney says they did nothing wrong. "When we learned that some of the jacket styles we were offering had labels that incorrectly identified they type of fur used for the trim, we corrected the labels by removing the potentially misleading language in compliance with FTC standards."

So how do you know what you are buying? If you really want "faux" fur how can you be sure it truly isn't from an animal? Here are some tips from the Fur Free Alliance:

Feel it: Roll the hairs between your finger and thumb. Real fur feels softer to the touch and easily rolls across your fingers. Faux is more coarse.

Check it out: Look at the hairs. Pull them apart and check out the base. Is it leather? That's the skin of the animal. Faux has colors that are more even and are equal in length to each other.

Pin it: Take the pin test. Is it tough to pierce a pin through the fur? It's tougher to push a pin through leather than synthetic fabric.

Burn it: Take a few hairs off the jacket. Light a match to it. Real fur sings and smells like hair burning. Fake fur melts and smells like burnt plastic.

So we'll have to see how the manufacturers and retailers fare next winter when the faux and real adorn store racks. At least now you can be a smarter consumer.

For the record, all the official responses from every company we spoke to are available after the jump:

Company Comments

Nordstrom

We sincerely apologize that the Joie vest was represented as faux fur. Nordstrom would not knowingly carry domesticated dog fur or misrepresent a fur item as faux fur. The Joie vest was carried on Nordstrom.com only, and we received confirmation in writing from the vendor in September, 2006 that the trim was faux fur. It was not until the HSUS contacted us and we contacted the vendor, that Joie confirmed the fur is actually not faux fur. Joie said they made a mistake in their written communication to Nordstrom about the item. We also will no longer carry faux or fur-trimmed item from Joie. While we support the HSUS in their efforts to ensure domesticated dog or cat fur does not end up in stores, we conducted a test on the merchandise to determine the source. Nordstrom had a third party test the vest using the worldwide standard protocol for fiber analysis-the American Association of Textile Chemist and Colorist (AATCC) 20A for Microscopic Fiber/Fur Identification-and it tested as coyote. In addition, Nordstrom carries no fur or fur trimmed products in its own private label merchandise.

Andrew Marc

At Andrew Marc, we share our customers' concerns regarding the possible mistreatment of animals. We do not use any animal whatsoever as "faux fur", and instead use only 100% synthetic fabric. When natural fur is used in our products, it is obtained from suppliers that comply with our stringent standards and U.S. government requirements for humane treatment of animals. We assure our customers and retailers that we are vigilant in overseeing our supply chain, and that we will cease doing business with any supplier if found to be in violation of our policies. We take pride in our brand and reputation for providing consumers with the highest quality products.

Macy's

Our company has a standing policy against the selling of any dog or cat fur. This policy is clearly communicated to all suppliers. Our supplier contracts require that all products be labeled accurately. Any violation of our policies or contracts is pursued vigorously with our suppliers, and any inappropriate or inaccurately labeled product is removed from our stores and online sites.--Elina Kazan, Macy's Spokesperson

Neiman Marcus

The Neiman Marcus Group, Inc. (NMG), as part of our corporate policy of 100% compliance with U.S. Government regulations, does not allow the import and export of products containing dog and cat fur, nor will we sell merchandise comprised of this fur. We are in compliance with The Dog and Cat Protection Act of 2000, which prohibits the import, or export of products containing dog and cat fur into or out of the United States.

As such, we inform suppliers of merchandise to NMG that we expect them to be in compliance with The Dog and Cat Protection Act of 2000, and we will not knowingly purchase merchandise containing dog and cat fur. We also educate the NMG organization of this prohibition and strictly enforce this law through the NMG compliance program and corporate legal department.

After the Humane Society report was released, we took all items with fur trim off of our websites. Further investigation assured us that these vendors were also in compliance with this Act and they have provided us with proof that the merchandise is properly labeled.

Michael Kors

Michael Kors is conducting our own internal investigation. -- Billy Daly, Vice President for Global Communications

Sean John

"I was completely unaware of the nature of this material, but as soon as we were alerted, the garments were pulled off the Macy's floor and website," Sean Combs said. "I have instructed our outerwear licensee to cease the production of any garments using this material immediately. I appreciate the tireless work that the Humane Society does and would like to thank them for bringing attention to this issue." When asked about any practices or changes they might put in place moving forward, a spokesperson said: "They are going to use faux fur trim only on the jackets."

House of Dereon

House of Dereon supports truth in labeling.

Rocawear

We were not aware that our product included raccoon dog materials. We have immediately instructed all manufacturers and licensees that no product can be produced using this fur. Additionally the items were removed from stores.

DKNY

We, like several other brands, recently learned that one of our products had an Asiatic raccoon trim. We were not aware that this type of fur was used. While it is not illegal to use this type of fur, we have taken measures to ensure that it is never again used for any of our products. -- Donna Karan International

Tommy Hilfiger

Upon learning of the Humane Society's allegations, Tommy Hilfiger Corporation conducted a thorough investigation with a reputable independent lab. According to the results, the fur in question is genuine coyote fur which contradicts the Humane Society's findings.

Even though the results confirm we did not use any materials sourced in an unethical way, Tommy Hilfiger Corporation has decided to eliminate any potential risk in the future by going completely fur-free and endorsing the Humane Society H.R. 891.

Burlington Coat Factory

For eight years, Burlington Coat Factory has been in the forefront of the fight to keep domestic animal fur out of the market. In 1998, Burlington Coat Factory donated \$100,000 to the Humane Society to support its successful effort to pass federal legislation banning the importation and sale of domestic dog and cat fur. Moreover, Burlington Coat Factory is in favor of the Humane Society's present efforts to repeal a legal loophole that allows manufacturers not to label fur valued at less than \$150.

The Humane Society has recently stated that certain Tommy Hilfiger and Andrew Marc coats might contain domestic dog fur. Burlington Coat Factory has never sold these coats and has never sold any product with fur from any domestic animal. Burlington Coat Factory does sell coats and jackets containing fur from a wild animal known as "Asiatic Raccoon."

The Humane Society has used the inflammatory and legally incorrect term "raccoon dog" in referring to this fur. The United States Government requires that this fur be labeled "Asiatic Raccoon". Two of Burlington Coat Factory's suppliers left out the word "Asiatic" on the tags affixed to some coats sold to Burlington Coat Factory. Burlington Coat Factory has since corrected all of its suppliers' errors and is selling no improperly labeled coats. We note that it would have been illegal for Burlington Coat Factory to have labeled the furs "raccoon dog" as the Humane Society suggests.

JC Penney

JCPenney is committed to ensuring our customers have accurate and appropriate information when shopping with us. When we learned that some jacket styles we were offering had labels that incorrectly identified the type of fur used for the trim, we corrected the labels by removing the potentially misleading language - in compliance with FTC standards.

To prevent an incident of species misidentification from happening in the future, we have implemented even more rigorous procedures with our suppliers to ensure that our labels are correct.

Joie

We were outraged to learn of this occurrence, and we have taken extreme measures with our manufacturers to prevent this from happening in the future. We thank the Humane Society for their diligence and positive work. -- Serge Azria, President, JOIE