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ESG: China unveils its textile recycling policy

In a previous [article](#), we discussed China's experimental personal carbon account that aims to promote green consumption behaviours in clothing, food, housing and transportation. Earlier last week, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) issued the [Guiding Opinions on Accelerating Textile Recycling and Utilisation](#), providing policy guidance on implementing green transformation measures in the country's textile sector.

As the world's largest producer and consumer of textiles, China consumes about 30 million tons of textiles annually, among which a sizeable portion ends up in landfills. Due to the lack of sustainable textile manufacturing standards and inadequate recycling/sorting infrastructure, only about 20% of the 22 million tons of waste textile produced annually are currently being recycled. This new policy aims to increase the textile recycling rate to 25% and 30% by 2025 and 2030 respectively, and to boost production capacity for recycled fibres by implementing measures about manufacturing, recycling and utilisation.

On the production side, the policy outlines three objectives: promoting green textile design, encouraging the use of green fibres, and strengthening the social responsibility of textile producers. It emphasises that textile producers should adopt green design by improving the ease of disassembly, classification and recycling of textiles and prioritising the use of recycled fibres as raw materials. Although the regulators have issued several national standards on the recycling of waste textiles in recent years, such as the [Technical Specifications for the Recycling of Waste Textiles](#) (GB/T 39781-2021), such standards have not been adopted by textile producers on a large scale. Going forward, a more comprehensive system of technical standards for manufacturing, certification and labelling of green textiles is likely to be established to guide the industry.

On the recycling/collecting side, the policy aims to set up textile recycling bins in residential communities, shopping malls and school campuses, as well as sorting facilities to improve the overall accessibility and sorting capacity. According to the policy, big data platforms could also play a vital role in building an efficient textile recycling network by

integrating information such as origin, quantity, textile type and destination in different stages of the textile recycling process.

On improving the overall utilisation of recycled textiles, the policy targets the uniform segment as the starting point. As uniforms are normally produced with the same material in large quantities, promoting the adoption of recycled material in uniforms for students and civil servants could kickstart the program rapidly. It also sets to expand the application of recycled textiles in other areas such as energy generation, construction materials, automobile interior and agriculture.

Overall, this policy marks the starting point of China's green efforts in the textile sector, which is part of its bigger strategy to steer consumption behaviours toward a more sustainable direction. With measures targeting the manufacturing, recycling and utilisation parts of the textile sector, this whole value chain approach is expected to drive new sector growth and more importantly to cultivate mindsets for sustainable consumption behaviours. We believe that similar guiding policies will soon be drafted for other consumer sectors to help accomplish China's goal of green consumption.

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