



## **Poison in the Furs – A new study of hazardous substances shows the dangers that consumers and employees of retail establishments face**

### **Background information: Hazardous chemicals in fur products**

Hamburg, 5 December 2011 – The garments made out of animal furs currently sold in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and other EU countries are generally harmful to your health. Coats, collars, hoods or scarves usually contain high concentrations of hazardous chemicals. This was proven in a new comprehensive test of more than 35 fur products, in which contaminants were detected that cause cancer, reproductive impairments, allergies, nerve damage, mucosal irritation or hormonal disorders. The toxins came from the chemicals that are usually used in fur processing for tanning, preservation, cleaning and dyeing. Residues such as formaldehyde, alkylphenols, heavy metals and polycyclic aromas remain in the furs for a long period of time and endanger the health of the consumers as well as the retail employees. The claim from the fur industry that fur is a natural products has been clearly refuted by VIER PFOTEN in their study “Poison in the Furs II” published on 5 December 2011.

### **VIER PFOTEN tests fur garments for contaminants**

Fur is not only cruelty to animals - it can also threaten human health. How high the contamination of a lot of the fur products on sale today really is and what health risks it may pose is shown in the report “Poison in the Furs II” published by VIER PFOTEN and EcoAid. In 2011, 35 fur products like jackets, caps and hood linings were purchased from retail outlets in Bulgaria, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Austria, Rumania and Switzerland, and then investigate for hazardous substances. International fashion labels like Gucci, Burberry or Max Mara were also represented as well as large fashion chain shops. Children’s clothing was also examined by a certified research laboratory. The furs came from minks, raccoon

dogs and foxes, which were the species most commonly kept on fur farms, and in two cases the fur was from a seal or a nutria. Following a similar test carried out by VIER PFOTEN in 2010, the most comprehensive investigation of fur garments in Europe shows alarming results again.



Laboratory analyse of a fur sample at Bremer Umweltinstitut

### Missing limits – missing controls

The frequent occurrence of hazardous chemicals in leather or textiles is commonly known. In contrast, there is a lack of meaningful information about chemical contamination regarding furs. Furs are seldom checked by the authorities. Therefore, in the newly published report, each chemical detected in a fur product was subjected to a triple evaluation: according to a self-imposed benchmark, voluntary standards of the leather and textile industries as well as local laws if they were available.

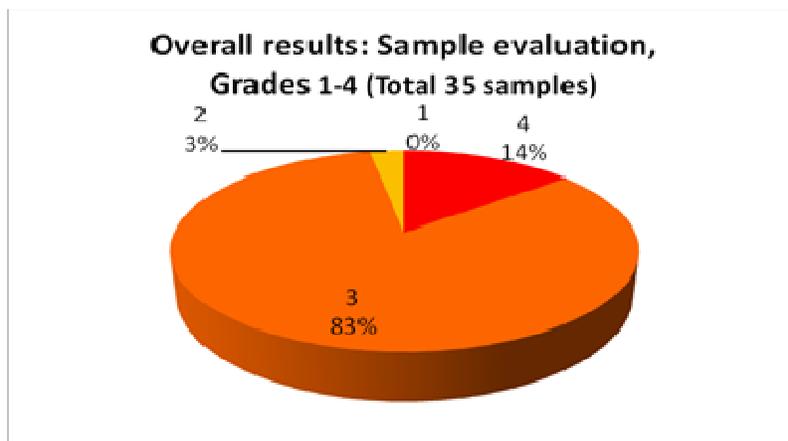


**Furs contain dangerous chemical cocktails**

A total of 15 hazardous substances and chemical groups were detected in the laboratory including formaldehyde, alkylphenol ethoxylates and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). The majority of the investigated samples were so contaminated with hazardous chemicals that a health risk to consumers and employees could not be excluded. For heavily contaminated products impairments to health were even more likely. Obviously the fur industry suffered no negative consequences from the unsettling results of the previous year’s investigation.

The contamination found in the furs examined in 2011 has increased in comparison to the investigation carried out in 2010:

- 14 % were “very heavily contaminated, very critical for health” (Grade 4),
- 83 % were “heavily contaminated, critical for health” (Grade 3)
- 3 % were “contaminated, not recommended” (Grade 2)
- 0 % were “without objection” (Grade 1)



In 12 cases the contamination of the furs was so high that VIER PFOTEN filed charges with the responsible authorities.



### Children’s jacket: Leading the contaminant content

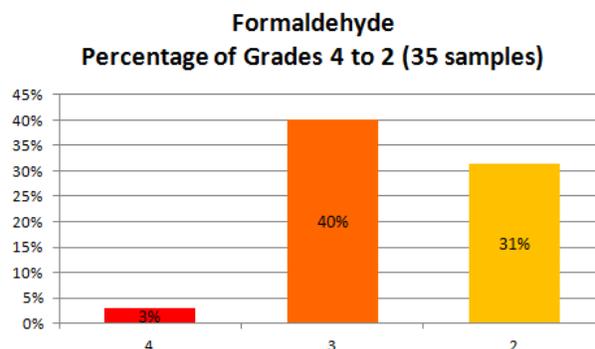
The most heavily contaminated garment was a children’s jacket from the Italian brand DIADORA which was purchased in Austria. The hood trimming made of raccoon dog had both the highest concentration of formaldehyde and the highest proportion of NPEOs (alkylphenols and ethoxylates) of the entire investigation. The values were so high that the jacket should not have been permitted to be sold based on the statutory guidelines in Europe.



### The most frequent and hazardous substances

#### Formaldehyde

Formaldehyde can be easily inhaled, is carcinogenic and can trigger allergies. In the fur products, it was one of the most frequently detected chemicals and found in high concentrations. The highest value was 550 mg/kg and was thereby significantly higher than the maximum value measured by us in furs in 2010 (450 mg/kg). 74 % of the samples were heavily to very heavily

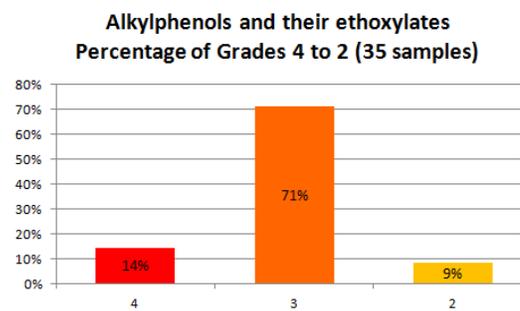




contaminated.

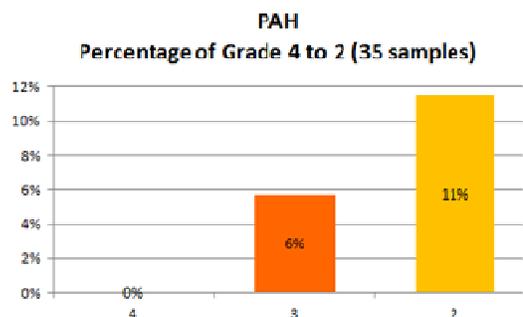
**Alkylphenols and ethoxylates**

With a similar effect to estrogen, the substances can interfere with the hormonal system of humans. These chemicals were detected in all of the fur products, 94% were heavily to very heavily contaminated. The concentrations found ranged up to 2500 milligrams per kilogram and were thereby at the top of all the residue values measured. The use of alkylphenol ethoxylates is forbidden in the EU. Should the products be processed in the EU, they may only contain a maximum of 1000 mg/kg. For 14 % percent of the samples there is the suspicion that the law was violated.



**Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)**

17 % of the furs were heavily contaminated with carcinogenic Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrogens (PAHs).





### **Further hazardous substances**

In many of the samples there were further hazardous substances detected in worryingly high concentrations like heavy metals, amines, preservatives, chlorinated paraffins and organotin compounds. Even the internationally prohibited pesticide DDT was detected in a mink hat bought in Switzerland.

### **VIER PFOTEN and the authors of the study from EcoAid recommend:**

Consumers should avoid purchasing fur products, not only on grounds of animal protection, but also as a precautionary measure for their own health.

### **VIER PFOTEN demands from the government and the economy:**

- An EU-wide ban on fur farming and trade – and an import ban on fur products.  
No use of hazardous chemicals in the production of fur, or at least the production processes must comply with legal limits, regulatory benchmarks and industry standards.
- Legal limits for chemicals of concern in fur products and consistent monitoring by the authorities.
- Mandatory labelling of all fur products with clear information on the species, origin and the rearing conditions.

### **Further information:**

The report “Poison in the Furs II” and this short fact sheet can be downloaded free of charge from the VIER PFOTEN website: [www.vierpfoten.org](http://www.vierpfoten.org) / [www.four-paws.uk](http://www.four-paws.uk)



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