

FABRICS & FASHIONS

By DLI's Research Department

Cleaning Belts

Accessories that coordinate with or match garments need periodic cleaning, but care instructions may be inaccurate or non-existent. Materials, construction methods and type of soiling need to be considered when cleaning belts.

The FTC's Care Label Rule does not require that care labels be attached to belts, scarves, shawls and gloves as long as they are not an integral part of the garment and can be detached.

Belts



Two layers of suede are stitched together on this belt and the metal buckle is covered with suede.

Belts may be made from fabric, leather, metal, wood or plastic that has been woven, knit, stitched, linked or glued together. Belt buckles are made of wood, leather, plastic or with fabric that covers metal or plastic forms. A belt may be one layer or several layers made of leather, fabric, interfacing and vinyl backing that have been stitched or glued to the fashion material.

Problems with Cleaning Belts

The variety of materials and conditions of use present numerous challenges in cleaning belts. Many consumers mistakenly believe that a matching belt can be cleaned in the same manner as the garment. Not so, since there are many components that might react differently to care procedures.

Some of the challenges to consider include:

Shrinkage, distortion, stiffening – Water or solvent cleaning can contribute to shrinkage of one or more components on a belt. It is difficult to test for this problem. Vinyl components can become stiff if a softening agent is removed by drycleaning solvents. The heat of a drying process can also cause distortion in some belt materials, such as vinyl.

Color Match – Colors in a garment usually fade with repeated drycleaning or laundering. Matching belts are not generally cleaned at the same time and will be closer to the original color. There is not a lot a cleaner can do to prevent this color variance, but if the counter person notices belt loops on a jacket or dress when it is received for cleaning, ask the customer about belts and then mention the possibility of a color variance after cleaning.

Adhesive or glue stains – Many fabric and leather belts have glues and adhesives that hold materials together. Adhesives can be water or solvent soluble and seep through the fabric, causing a dark discoloration that may be permanent.

Buckles – The adhesives or glues used to adhere fabric to a buckle frame may be solvent or water soluble and bleed through the fabric, causing a dark discoloration. Metal frames in a buckle can rust if allowed to remain damp, causing staining in the outer fabric. Plastic frames that are made from polystyrene will dissolve in perchloroethylene drycleaning solvent. Test carefully with the solvent that will be used in the cleaning process.

Lacquer coatings on metal buckles may be scratched or chipped from use or while tumbling in the cleaning machine. The coating may be damaged by drycleaning solvents. Wood and leather buckles may be damaged by water or solvent.

Receiving at the Counter

Check the overall condition of the belt. If the fabric shows fraying, broken stitches or excessive soiling, there may not be a satisfactory way to clean the belt without causing permanent damage.

Spotting and Cleaning

Leather and suede belts should be handled by a professional leather cleaner. Fabric belts may be cleaned by hand if testing shows components are colorfast to the cleaning solution. If there are no vinyl backings, delicate buckles or other trimmings, it may be possible to dryclean or wetclean the belt.

Local stains on fabric belts may be spotted, but observe if the area will be a different color than the rest of the belt. If colorfastness tests show the color is safe, you may be able to clean the entire belt by hand. If the fab-

ric is drycleanable, work in a well-ventilated area, following appropriate guidelines on the SDS (Safety Data Sheet) for the chemical, and wipe the fabric with a clean cloth saturated with volatile dry solvent. Water-soluble stains should be flushed with a steam gun and appropriate wet-side spotting agents, blotted with a clean white towel to absorb staining material and the spotting agent, flushed thoroughly, and dried with the air gun.

Finishing

A belt may not need finishing. If a belt is made of fabric, only, it may be necessary to apply minimal steam to it to remove wrinkles.

Leather, suede, and belts with a vinyl backing can be damaged by heat and steam, so check the components of the belt carefully.



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