



Your favorite sweater shrank, your new pants puckered, and the colors in your designer shirt ran. You're furious!

Don't toss the clothes out just yet. If you followed the cleaning instructions on the care labels, you can return the garments and ask the retailer for an exchange or a refund.

Under the Federal Trade Commission's Care Labeling Rule, manufacturers must tag their clothing to be sold in the United States with at least one safe cleaning method. Garments sold without a care label—or with inaccurate cleaning instructions—may violate the rule. As of July 1, 1997, manufacturers began using certain care symbols in place of words on garment labels. Written explanations of the symbols on hang tags or elsewhere on garments are no longer required but are permissible when used with the appropriate symbols. It is important that consumers learn and understand the care symbols.

This brochure explains the care symbols and what to do if your clothes end up damaged—even after you've followed the care instructions.

What should the label say?

Manufacturers are requested to give at least one safe cleaning method. If there is no safe method, the label must clearly indicate no

laundering, no dry cleaning. In addition, care labels must list any necessary warnings about the cleaning method. For example, the label must say whether any step of the care method—washing, bleaching, drying, ironing, or dry cleaning—could harm the garment or other items that are cleaned with it.

Does "Washable" also mean my garment can be dry cleaned?

Not necessarily. Only one method of safe care has to be listed—regardless of how many safe methods could be used. The label does not have to warn about unsafe cleaning methods. For example, clothing labeled "washable" may not dry clean well.

What about trim?

Care instructions apply to all permanently attached parts of the garment such as buttons, lining, or decorative trim. Labels that say "Dry Clean Only, Exclusive of Decorative Trim" do not meet legal standards because they do not explain that the trim must be removed before the garment is cleaned or give a separate care method for the trim.

What if I have a problem?

If you follow the washing instructions and your red and white shirt is now pink, or if your garment was dry cleaned according to the care instructions and is damaged, return it to the retailer and ask for an exchange or

refund. If the retailer does not cooperate, ask for the manufacturer's name and address and write directly to the company.

In your letter, describe the garment and list information from the labels and tags. Estimate how many times you have washed the garment or had it dry cleaned. Include the full name and address of the retailer and your own address. Enclose a record of the sale (receipt, canceled check) and explain how you would like the manufacturer to respond to your problem (send another garment, refund money, etc.). Also include a date by which to respond.

You also can contact the FTC by writing to the address below. Although the FTC cannot resolve individual disputes, the information you provide may indicate a pattern of law violations requiring action by the commission.

Can I remove the label?

Care labels must be attached when you buy clothing. The recommended care could influence your purchasing decision. For example, you might want to avoid "Dry Clean Only" items if you are concerned about cleaning and upkeep costs. Although you can remove a care label, you risk losing important information about the proper care of your garment.

For more information:
 Consumer Response Center
 Federal Trade Commission
 Washington, DC 20580
 (202) 326-2222
 TDD (202) 326-2502
 Internet site: www.ftc.gov

CARE LABEL GUIDE

MACHINE WASH	BLEACH	TUMBLE DRY	DRY	IRON	DRY CLEAN
TEMPERATURE		HEAT SETTING		TEMPERATURE	
Cool/Cold	Any Bleach (when needed)	No Heat	Line Dry/ Hang to Dry	(Dry or Steam)	Dry Clean
Warm	Only Non-chlorine Bleach (when needed).	Low	Drip Dry	Low	Do Not Dry Clean
Hot		Medium	Dry Flat	Medium	Dryclean-Normal Cycle
Cycle	Do Not Bleach	High	Dry in the Shade	High	any solvent
Normal		Any Heat	Do Not Dry	Other	perchloroethylene or petroleum solvent no trichloroethylene
Permanent Press		Cycle	Do Not Wring	No Steam	P
Delicate/Gentle		Normal		Do Not Iron	F
Other		Permanent Press			PROFESSIONALLY DRYCLEAN
Do Not Wash		Delicate/Gentle			
Hand Wash		Other			
		Do Not Tumble Dry			

NOTE: The water temperatures listed in the chart above are provided as a guideline. Actual water temperatures in the home depend on the washing machine settings (hot, warm, cold), regional water supply temperatures, and water heater.

Adapted for use in Kentucky from "Care Labels and Your Clothes" by Pam Brown, Extension Specialist, Consumer Sciences; Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

Marjorie M. Baker, M.S.
 Extension Associate for Clothing & Textiles
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