



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20580

Division of Enforcement
Bureau of Consumer Protection

August 2, 2005

Mr. E. Linwood Wright, III
Chairman
Textile Bedding Committee
National Textile Association
6 Beacon Street, Suite 1125
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Mr. Wright:

Thank you for your letter requesting a Commission staff opinion regarding the appropriate way to disclose fabric "thread count" (yarns per square inch) on labels or in advertising for household textile products, such as bed sheets. Please note that this information is not required pursuant to the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act, 15 U.S.C. § 70 *et seq.*, and Commission rules and regulations under the Act, 16 C.F.R. Part 303. It is, however, governed by Section 5 of the FTC Act, which prohibits deceptive acts or practices. 15 U.S.C. § 45.

You state that the thread count is an important indicator of fabric quality for consumers who purchase textile bedding products, and that thread count has evolved over time as a key indicator used by consumers to make purchasing decisions. In addition, you state that it is generally understood that a higher thread count indicates a better product. Your letter describes the specific issue with regard to description of thread count as follows:

The common practice in the U.S. textile bedding industry for decades has been to count the number of threads in both the warp and filling directions. Yarns were counted as one yarn, regardless of whether the yarn was a single ply or multi-ply yarn. (A multi-ply yarn is one yarn that has been created by twisting two or more yarns together.) In recent years, however, some textile bedding suppliers have changed the way they have determined thread count by counting plied yarns individually. This practice inflates the thread count numbers to levels which double or triple (or more) the thread count as determined by the long standing, traditional way. This practice has also created confusion in the marketplace and has caused consumers to compare thread counts that may have been calculated in two dramatically different ways.

Finally, you state that some of your member companies have experienced competitive disadvantage by using the traditional method of counting threads and are considering switching to the method of multiplying by the number of plies within a yarn, thus achieving a higher thread count. You ask for the staff's opinion as to whether the new method could violate Section 5 of the FTC Act.

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You further note that ASTM, an international standards organization, has addressed this issue in its Standard Test Method for Warp End Count and Filling Pick Count of Woven Fabric, Designation: D3775-03a. Section 9.1.4 instructs: "Count individual warp yarns (ends) and filling yarns (picks) as single units regardless of whether they are comprised of single or plied components."

A representation about thread count, like other objective, material claims about a product, must be supported by a "reasonable basis." In determining what constitutes a reasonable basis for claims, we consider what experts in the field believe is appropriate, including whether there are relevant consensus based test procedures, such as an ASTM test procedure, or other widely accepted industry practices that apply to the matter. If so, we give such procedures or practices great weight in determining whether the advertiser has met its substantiation burden.

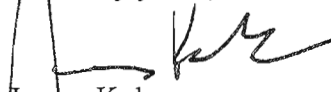
Based upon the ASTM standard, as well as the information you have provided about standard industry practices with regard to disclosing thread count, we believe that consumers could be deceived or misled by the practice of stating an inflated thread count, achieved by multiplying the actual count by the number of plies within the yarn. A possible non-deceptive way to disclose both the thread count and the yarn ply would be to state, for example: "300 thread count, 2 ply yarn." A representation of "600 thread count" for this same product would likely mislead consumers about the quality of the product being purchased.

I also wish to bring to your attention a 1996 closing letter, placed on the FTC public record, terminating an investigation of possibly deceptive practices in connection with the packaging of down comforters. In that instance, the staff determined that no further Commission action was warranted when the company notified the staff that it was changing its package product description from "finely woven 760 threads per sq. inch" to "finely woven 380 2-ply fabric." A copy of this closing letter is attached.

In accordance with Section 1.3(c) of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, 16 C.F.R. § 1.3(c), this is a staff opinion only and has not been reviewed or approved by the Commission or by any individual Commissioner, and is given without prejudice to the right of the Commission later to rescind the advice and, where appropriate, to commence an enforcement action. In accordance with Section 1.4 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, 16 C.F.R. § 1.4, your request for advice, along with this response, will be placed on the public record.

We appreciate your taking the time to write to us. Please feel free to call Steve Ecklund at 202-326-2841 if you have any further questions.

Sincerely yours,



James Kohm

Associate Director for Enforcement

Enclosure