

Joint press text by PFI and IKW, February 2014

Compatibility of Shoe Uppers with Care Products

Frankfurt am Main/Pirmasens, February 2014. Compared with the previous years, manufacturers of shoe care products received in 2013 a clearly higher number of customer complaints after use of their products. That was about shoes made from synthetic materials or leather from a small number of shoe manufacturers. In most cases, the complaints were due to the impacted shoe uppers not being compatible with shoe care products. This applied to both care products based on water and solvent-based care products.

Finishing agents based on aqueous formulations are used in leather and shoe production, frequently with a view to creating fashion effects. Quite often, finishing agents of a different colour are applied to leather. In shoes of all price segments from some manufacturers, such finishing agents are increasingly not wipe- or water-resistant, and colour changes occur in contact with water or care products. With sensitive leathers it is also observed that often the colourants are not stably bound. Under the impact of care products, they migrate to the surface and can cause irreversible colour changes.

As a contribution to environmental protection, for some years many shoe creams have been based mainly on solvent-free, water-based formulations. Such care products are highly suitable for shoe uppers of good quality. However, the number of customer complaints after use of aqueous emulsion creams rose significantly in the course of 2013 in connection with some makes of shoes. Where economies are made – for reasons of fashion or costs – in the quality of finishing agents for shoe uppers, such finishing agents can be wiped off with just a wet cloth, irrespective of the use of a care product. Irreparable damage is possible where finishing agents of a different colour are applied.

Not all shoe uppers used are compatible with solvent-containing, commercial grade care sprays (e.g. waterproofing sprays) either. In some instances, uppers are degraded or become swollen. When wearing the shoes, microcracks invisible to the eye form in the uppers so that solvents can penetrate into the material and intensify these effects. Also in such cases, irreparable damage can be done to the shoes. Here, especially the formation of spots or grey discolouration should be mentioned. Usually, such care sprays contain either alcohol or special spirits. They, too, are perfectly suitable for shoe uppers of good quality.

In cooperation with the Test and Research Institute Pirmasens (PFI) the manufacturers of leather care products within the German Cosmetic, Toiletry, Perfumery and Detergent Association (IKW) have developed the IKW Quality Assessment Recommendation "Compatibility of Shoe Uppers with Care Products". This gives shoe manufacturers and traders an instrument at hand for examining shoe uppers in this respect. The IKW recommendation can also be used in other fields, e.g. leather for furniture and bags. It is available on the internet at www.haushaltspflege.org – Themen – Informationen für Hersteller, together with the Recommendations for the Quality Assessment of Leather Care Products.