

Investigating Aspects of Corporate Responsibility as a Supplement to Product Tests – the Approach taken by STIFTUNG WARENTEST

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Within the framework of its test work STIFTUNG WARENTEST is planning to also make aspects of corporate responsibility part of its investigations in future. In addition to the usual evaluation of the investigated products, interested consumers should also be provided with information and assessments of the ethical, social and ecological behaviour of the respective manufacturers.

Initially, in several pilot projects data relevant to this new assessment dimension will be collected and validated, and then made available to consumers in the form of an aggregated evaluation in addition to the product evaluations. Initially it is not intended to summarise them in one verdict. The pilot projects will be the tests on

- Outdoor jackets
- Frozen salmon
- Universal laundry detergents

for which the field study phase is taking place at the present. The same set of core criteria will be used as the basis for all the investigations. They have been primarily selected with reference to international regulations and standards (e.g. the Global Compact of the UN, the OECD guidelines for multi-national enterprises, the standards of the International Labor Organisation ILO, the International Standard Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000) and the Global Reporting Initiative GRI). Other criteria, which have already proved to be suitable in other national and international projects on company assessment, have been added. Furthermore, the core criteria in each pilot project respectively will be supplemented with criteria which are specifically relevant to manufacturing the investigated product.

The investigation will cover the company which manufactures the product tested by STIFTUNG WARENTEST. In the case of larger enterprises with different business sectors or branches, the area under investigation will only be the company's business unit which actually manufactures the tested product.

The data will first be collected by means of the answers of the company to a questionnaire. This will then be followed up by a validation process, which will specifically involve a comparison with data from other publicly accessible sources, as well as a partial check carried out by experts.

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STIFTUNG WARENTEST will make a decision as to whether to continue this area of work at a later date after the pilot study. The response of “test” readers to this new investigation will thereby play a major role.

Curriculum Vitae

Holger Brackemann studied physical and technical chemistry at the University of Göttingen (Germany) and earned a doctorate (doctor of science, DSc) in 1989. Thereafter he started working at the Federal Environmental Agency (Umweltbundesamt) in Berlin on the regulation of CFCs and chlorinated hydrocarbons. From 1992 to 1996 he was spokesman of the agency. After that he became head of a section responsible for the hazard assessment of chemicals to waters. From 2000 to 2003 he was leading the section “General aspects of water management, groundwater protection” of the Umweltbundesamt. In 2003 he took up the position of a head of department at the German consumer organization STIFTUNG WARENTEST. He is responsible for the testing of household and garden appliances, leisure products, touristic and transport services. A further current topic of his work is the implementation of aspects of corporate social responsibility in the testing work of STIFTUNG WARENTEST.

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