



Pairs of West Coast sustainable shoes were distributed to the poor in host city Novo Hamburgo.

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Sustainable shoe on show at Fimec

Footwear manufacturer Priority Group used the 2011 edition of the Fimec exhibition in Novo Hamburgo, Brazil, to launch what it claims is a 100% sustainable sports leisure shoe. One of the principal components is chrome-free leather from Brazilian tanning group Bom Retiro. The shoe upper combines flashes of the leather with textiles..

Priority developed the shoe under its West Coast brand in partnership with a local consultancy, Coelho Assessoria, and the Brazilian Institute for Technology for the Leather and Footwear Industries (IBTeC). In spite of an ongoing debate about the environmental impact of the chromium used in the tanning industry, an IBTeC chemistry consultant, Morgana Streicher, told *World Footwear* that the project management team believed the chrome-free leather from Bom Retiro would help enhance the sustainability credentials of the shoe. She said concerns about chromium VI developing were prevalent among many big-name retailers.

Sixty companies contributed materials, machines and know-how to a demonstration area at Fimec 2011 to show off new techniques for footwear manufacture. One of the products on show was, according to the organisers, a wholly sustainable shoe.



Chrome-free leather and organic cotton stitching were part of the West Coast shoe.

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There is an interesting argument about the sustainability of chrome-tanned leather. Chrome comes from the earth; if a shoe goes into landfill, any chrome in the leather is returning to the earth. The thinking with the West Coast shoe, according to Ms Streicher, was more that they wanted to make sure there was no risk of chrome III oxidising into chrome VI. For this reason, major Brazilian tanning group Bom Retiro made the leather without using any heavy metals.

This project shows that the technology and materials exist to source a shoe with this level of sustainability. As soon as the market seems receptive and willing to pay a necessarily higher price to have stitching that uses organic cotton, lining from bamboo fibre, soles from post-consumer-use rubber and leather produced without any heavy metals, this Brazilian footwear brand can respond.

Pairs of the West Coast sustainable shoes were part of special section of Fimec 2011 called Fábrica Conceito (Concept Factory). This was an IBTeC initiative, run with the support of the Fimec organisers and Coelho Assessoria. A long list of other companies in the footwear supply chain, around 60 in total including Bom Retiro, contributed machinery and materials to help the project run. The Concept Factory occupied 570 square-metres of space at the event, setting up a production line, complete with machinery, and teams of people working on models of men's and women's dress shoes as well as the more casual West Coast casual model.



The Concept Factory also made dress shoes for men and women.

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IBTeC president, Rui Guerrero, said he felt the idea represented a great opportunity for people to watch demonstrations of how new materials can work in the context of a modern footwear factory, slotting into the operation in real time. "It's a showroom of opportunities for visitors and exhibitors at Fimec," he said. "It's a practical demonstration of a high-tech footwear manufacturing operation."

The pairs of the West Coast sustainable shoes that the Fábrica Conceito produced during its four-day demonstration at Fimec went to a charity in host city Novo Hamburgo for distribution to the poor. 🌐



The organisers say the Fimec exercise proves Brazilian manufacturers can roll out sustainable shoes as soon as the market is ready.

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