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Humane Society urges crackdown on dog fur

Animal rights organization wants FTC to fine retailers, grab inventories

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WASHINGTON - A national animal rights group wants to put a group of fur retailers and manufacturers in the dog house.

The Humane Society of the United States asked the Federal Trade Commission on Tuesday to fine high-end retailers and designers of clothing that contains mislabeled fur from dogs, wolves and raccoon dogs. The group also would like inventories seized and perhaps charges filed.

"Consumers have a right to know what they are purchasing," said Michael Markarian, the executive vice president of the Humane Society. "If they are truly getting a type of dog fur, they should be outraged."

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The documents filed with the FTC name designers Andrew Marc and Michael Kors, among others. Many major department stores, including Barneys New York, Macy's, Dillard's, J.C. Penney, and Neiman Marcus also were cited.

The petition stems from a Humane Society

NBC VIDEO



- **Retailers accused of using dog fur**
March 13: The Humane Society will file a petition against retailers who altered origin of fur. TODAY's Janice Lieberman reports.

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investigation that turned up products that were made with fur from dogs, wolves or raccoon dogs, a species found mainly in China, that were sold as either fake fur or other types of fur in violation of the Federal Fur Products Labeling Act.

Raccoon dogs look like oversize, fluffy raccoons and aren't kept as pets. Importing their fur is not illegal, but activists argue they are still a type of dog.

Mislabeling fur is a misdemeanor punishable by up to a \$5,000 fine or a year in prison. Fur valued at less than \$150 doesn't have to be labeled.

Jim Sluzewski, a spokesman for Macy's parent, Federated Department Stores Inc., said his company opposes selling dog fur but takes its vendors on faith that they comply with company policy.

"It is our vendors that label product, and we expect them to do so accurately," he said in an e-mail. "We take immediate action whenever we find a violation of policy."

Late last year, Macy's immediately pulled from its shelves coats with raccoon dog fur but labeled as raccoon after the Humane Society raised the issue with the chain.

"Macy's hasn't done enough as far as we're concerned," Markarian said Monday, claiming that it is still selling other products with raccoon dog fur.

The Humane Society said in its petition that Barneys sold fur-trimmed jackets marketed as coyote fur when it was really fur from wolves. Barneys did not return a call for comment.

Josh Chapman, a spokesman for the manufacturer of the jacket, I. Spiewak and Sons Inc., said his company inspects the facilities where they purchase coyote fur. "We certainly know that everything is coyote, nothing could be anything else," Chapman insisted.

Design company Michael Kors (USA) Inc. said it is conducting its own internal investigation on the sources of fur products it sold through Dillard's stores.

"We certainly expect the companies to be discussing these issues internally, but they've had plenty of time to do that," Markarian said.

Dillard's did not respond to a requests for comment. J.C. Penney said it had no comment.

Neiman Marcus Group Inc. spokeswoman Ginger Reeder said her company removed all products with fur trim from their Web sites after the Humane Society investigation.

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"Further investigation assured us that these vendors were also in compliance with this act and they have provided us with proof that the merchandise is properly labeled," Reeder said.

Charles Jayson, chief executive of Andrew Marc, disputed the Humane Society and insisted in a statement that all fur on his coats labeled as raccoon contains "only farm-bred raccoon fur from Finland, and our items labeled 'faux fur' are a 100 percent synthetic fabric."

The results of the Humane Society investigations set some retailers scrambling to pull the coats from shelves, take them off Web sites and offer refunds to consumers. They include Nordstrom, Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger and Burlington Coat Factory. None of them was named in the Humane Society's complaint to the FTC.

"We believe that many of the companies were just as shocked as we were," Markarian said about various responses to the investigations. "Some companies have been leading the way. ... The other companies, by comparison, have done nothing."

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