



Contributors

Michael Markarian: The sale of dog fur is still extensive

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EVEN THOUGH Congress banned the sale of dog and cat fur in 2000, an investigation by the Humane Society of the United States this winter revealed that dog fur is still slipping into the country and being sold everywhere from bargain retailers to upscale department stores.

Dozens of designers and retailers were found to be selling jackets trimmed with dog fur. Some was from domestic dogs like German shepherds and collies, and some was from “raccoon dogs,” an Asian canine species whose fur is often passed off as raccoon because of its markings, even though it’s a member of the dog family. They are raised in China by the millions, in conditions to match anything in the most brutal of factory farms.

Every fur-trimmed jacket tested was found to be falsely advertised as “faux,” falsely labeled as a different species of animal, or not labeled at all. When customers thought they were buying synthetic fur, or fur from a legally killed species like rabbit or raccoon, in most cases they were really getting dog fur.

Twenty-four of the 25 coats contained fur from domestic dogs, wolves, or raccoon dogs. Some companies — like Joie, Jay-Z’s Rocawear and Diddy’s Sean John — have been so shocked that they voluntarily pulled the jackets from circulation. DKNY will no longer use raccoon dog fur, and both Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger have pledged to phase out the use of real fur entirely.

The problem is that the designers, retailers, and consumers can have no confidence in what type of fur they are getting, especially when it is sourced from China, which has now become the leading exporter of fur garments to the United States.

Because of the mass infusion of Chinese fur into Western markets, and because of a major loophole in the

law that allows many fur-trimmed parkas, jackets, and other apparel to be sold without labels, it's easy for fur sellers to put whatever type of fur they want on the garments.

Congressmen Jim Moran (D.-Va.) and Mike Ferguson (R.-N.J.) have introduced a bill to close these loopholes. The Dog and Cat Fur Prohibition Enforcement Act, H.R. 891, would require that all fur apparel be labeled properly, and would specifically ban the sale of raccoon dog fur. Retailers like Burlington Coat Factory and Loehmann's, and designers like Project Runway winner Jay McCarroll and Beyoncé's House of Deréon, have already endorsed the legislation to help enforce the law against dog fur. Last week, the Humane Society of the United States filed a legal petition with the Federal Trade Commission asking the agency to take action as well.

The current fur-labeling law, passed in 1951, requires a label on fur apparel including the name of the species used, manufacturer, country of origin, and other information. But while the fur industry has changed a great deal in the last half century, a loophole in the law hasn't changed since the Truman years. It exempts products with a "relatively small quantity or value" of fur. The Federal Trade Commission defines that value as \$150, and leaves consumers guessing as to whether the fur is real or faux, let alone from what animal or country.

If a \$500 coat has \$150 worth of mink on the collar and cuffs, it is unfair and even deceptive to consumers that this apparel would not require a label. Based on approximate pelt prices after processing, an individual garment using the fur from 30 rabbits (\$5 each) could be sold without a label.

The same goes for 25 ermines (\$6 each), five raccoons (\$28 each), three badgers, beavers, fishers, or minks (\$50 each), three Arctic, grey, or red foxes (\$50 each), one bear or timber wolf (\$150), and so on. Lots of fur from lots of animals, and still there would be no requirement of a label.

Clear labeling and a ban on raccoon dog fur will be a deterrent for fur sellers to try to pass off dog fur as something it's not. By passing the Dog and Cat Fur Prohibition Enforcement Act, Congress can spare millions of creatures from misery, and protect millions of Americans from a cruel deception.

Michael Markarian is executive vice president of the Humane Society of the United States. For a video on the fur scandal, go to www.hsus.org/furfree.