



# Improving chemical management in China

Zalando SE and GIZ are improving chemical management systems in shoe factories



## The challenge

The shoe industry is an important employer for many workers in China. Zhejiang and Guangdong are the two major areas for shoe production. Some chemicals which are used in shoe production processes can be harmful to the worker's health and the environment, if not handled correctly. But often the factory management and workers lack the awareness of their protection and control measures.

Companies try to combat these issues with internal codes of conduct and audits. However, many of the small and medium sized factories in the region do not have the tools to evaluate their performance and to implement improvements.

Zalando is aware of its responsibility towards the people working in its supply chain and is committed to ensure the sold goods have been produced in an ethical, safe and climate-conscious manner.

## The solution

Since 2018, Zalando has been engaged in a development partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as part of the develoPPP.de programme for achieving goals toward social and environmental sustainability.

Together, Zalando and GIZ implement the capacity building program 'Improving Chemical Management through more Sustainable Practices in Chinese Shoe Factories'. This project addresses the industry-wide challenge faced by the polyurethane shoe sector in reducing the harmful impact of chemicals on workers and environment and improving chemical handling processes as well as ensuring safer working conditions. Eleven factories of different sizes from the regions of Zhejiang and Guangdong have been selected for this project.

*'This project focuses on addressing the main pain points SMEs have. It brings prolonged mutual benefit to worker health, environmental protection & product safety. Participating factories will be more prepared for the increasing industrial requirements.'*

Kate Heiny, Director, Sustainability, Zalando SE

## At a glance

<b>Duration</b>	01 May 2018 – 30 June 2021
<b>Country</b>	China
<b>Objective</b>	To improve the chemical management system of China polyurethane (PU) shoe factories
<b>Partners</b>	Zalando SE and GIZ
<b>Implementing Partner</b>	TUV Rheinland



## Contact Information

**Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH**  
Dieter Frick  
T + 49 (0) 6196 79-6519  
E dieter.frick@giz.de  
I www.develoPPP.de

**Zalando SE**  
Caitlin Frevert  
T + 49 (0) 174 2085655  
E caitlin.frevert@zalando.de  
I www.zalando.de

## Our services

Over two years, the chemical experts of TÜV Rheinland carried out chemical mapping and chemical testing in each of the factories in order to identify their hotspots and their needs in chemical management system (CMS) in these four areas: management tool, traceability, hazardous substances identification and environment, health & safety (EHS).

After the full assessment, an action plan with concrete recommended actions and timelines on how to incorporate good practices was developed for each factory. These action plans aim at step by step improvement in those four areas. To help factories with the implementation and to monitor improvements, on-site tutorship by local TÜV Rheinland chemical experts was offered to the selected factories.

Further, to achieve a broader impact, the "Train-the-trainer" approach was chosen. Management and workers nominated by each factory were trained by the chemical experts to increase their awareness on the risks associated with the use of chemicals in shoe manufacturing, as well as to equip the factories with the knowledge and tools to build a robust chemical management system. Some of them were chosen as their factory in-house trainers to undergo further training for carrying out internal trainings at their own factories.

Finally, the gained knowledge was shared with a wide range of stakeholders. The Project will incorporate training modules on safe chemical management into one of the local educational institutions in the region. Useful materials will be shared with more stakeholders, e.g. brands, suppliers, allowing them to implement the programme in their supply chain to achieve broader influence.

This benefits not only the Zalando supply chain but also the local shoe industry in China and the wider shoe and fashion sector due to the sharing of knowledge which enables a more efficient and safer use of chemicals. In turn this allows for a more sustainable production overall at the end of the project.

What benefits does Zalando gain from the cooperation with GIZ? GIZ has longtime experience in supporting international chemicals projects and, therefore, a wealth of expertise. Additionally, GIZ has experience in capacity building such as in-house training as well as technical expertise and knowledge in the development of toolkits which are essential for this project.

## Impacts and results

- 11 shoe factories have completed the projects and made improvement in their chemical management system (CMS),
- 106 management & workers have been trained, 30 of them were further trained as in-house trainers and delivered in-house trainings that cover additional 12% of total workforce.
- The knowledge level of trained workers has risen by 87%.
- Training materials focusing on chemical management in polyurethane shoe production have been developed and made available in the industry.
- A toolkit of conducting chemical mapping, testing, worker training and action plan development for the polyurethane footwear sector has been developed to share the knowledge in the industry.
- The university course on safety management and emergency response on hazardous chemicals at Guangdong University of Technology incorporated project materials into their curriculum

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Development Partnerships with the Private Sector  
(develoPPP.de)  
Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5  
65760 Eschborn  
Germany  
T + 49 (0) 61 96 79-73 77  
F + 49 (0) 61 96 79-11 15  
E develoPPP@giz.de  
I www.giz.de

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