

Don't Be Cruel: Support *Fur Free* Companies ONLY!

By Pierre Grzybowski, Deputy Manager, Fur Free Campaign for The Humane Society of the United States

Your favorite designer is fur-free. This statement may not be true for everyone, but as increasing numbers of retailers and designers are dropping animal fur from their lines, or deciding never to use it in the first place, the odds of its veracity are improving. **The Humane Society of the United States publishes a growing list of companies-71 to date-who have said no to animal fur, including industry heavyweights like Calvin Klein, Polo Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger.**

While some of the listed companies have always avoided animal fur, several changed recently when revelations of dog fur, animals being skinned alive, and false advertising and labeling rocked the industry. The Humane Society of the United States generated much of this last winter when it published its test results on 25 fur-trimmed jackets bought from well-known stores around the country.

Twenty of the coats contained fur from the raccoon dog, a reclusive wild dog with a strong facial resemblance to the raccoon we know. With the dreadful misfortune of having long, beautiful fur, they are raised by the millions in China-held in small wire cages-and when it is time to die, clumsily slammed to the ground and then too often skinned while still conscious. In 2004-2005, investigators for Swiss Animal Protection and EAST International first documented the extensive skinning of alive and conscious raccoon dogs- the skin (*to which the fur is attached*) is literally pulled off the living animal. Reporters for the Beijing News subsequently confirmed this practice. The reports and footage **indicate that it simply does not matter to the skinners whether the animals are alive or dead-raccoon dogs apparently cannot put up enough of a fight to make it worth interrupting the process.** What's more, every single one of the twenty jackets that tested positive for raccoon dog was falsely advertised, falsely labeled, or not labeled at all. Consumers who thought



Cruel Facts: An investigation by three animal protection groups into the Chinese fur trade in 2004 and part of 2005 asserts that approximately 1.5 million raccoon dogs are being raised for fur in China. Raccoon dogs comprise 11% of all animals hunted in Japan. Twenty percent of domestically produced fur in Russia is from raccoon dogs.

they were getting faux fur, raccoon, rabbit, or coyote fur, actually got raccoon dog.

The testing also revealed that an additional three garments contained domestic dog fur, all three of which were sold as fake fur. The Humane Society of United States already knew about the trade in domestic dog fur, having traveled to several countries in Asia in 1997 and 1998 and producing a report that estimated that 2 million dogs and cats were being brutalized and killed each year- mainly in China- for such things as jacket trimmings and full-length fur garments.

While the Humane Society of the United States helped pass a law in 2000 that made it illegal to trade in domestic dog and cat fur, raccoon dogs were not included. With the raccoon dog fur now pouring into the country- mostly as jackets trimmings- consumers are finding it hard to avoid even if they want to. The Fur Products Labeling Act of 1951-which was intended to protect consumers from misrepresentation-includes a loophole

that allows much of the fur-trimmed jackets being sold to go unlabeled. Even if the raccoon dog fur on the jacket is labeled, it is likely called "*raccoon,*" "*finn raccoon,*" or some other false name.

There is currently a bill in Congress-H.R. 891, sponsored by Representatives Jim Moran (D-Va.) and Michael Ferguson (R-N.J.)--that would close the loophole in the Fur Products Labeling Act and ban the sale of raccoon dog fur. Animal advocates should contact their federal representatives and ask them to co-sponsor this legislation.

Raccoon dogs skinned alive, domestic dogs used for fur, and industry-wide false advertising and labeling- it was the publication of these findings and the accompanying media storm and consumer outcry that led to a number of companies going fur-free. However, preliminary investigation by the Humane Society of the United States this season has found that some retailers and designers have not changed much. Many new garments out on the shelves appear to contain raccoon dog fur being sold either falsely advertised or labeled, or not labeled at all.

The Humane Society encourages consumers to forgo all real fur, and avoid the raccoon dog problem altogether. A good place to start any holiday shopping trip is the list of fur-free companies www.humanesociety.org/furfreeshopping. It is also advised to always examine any suspicious fur very carefully, even if it is from a listed company. If skin is visible when the hairs of the trim are pulled apart-it is real fur. If the cross-hatch pattern of fabric can be seen- it is most likely faux. **When in doubt, avoid buying it.**

For more information, visit humanesociety.org.

Be on the lookout for more Pet Care and Compassion information in next month's issue!