



Key facts

- The UK arm of the German based organisation E.on, the largest privately owned utility company in the world employing some 88,000 in over 20 countries.
- As a business they provide uniforms for approx. 4000 personnel across three internal departments. A pan European working group has been devised to develop an Eon specific range of workwear, with representatives from across the EU.
- The majority of the current uniform is supplied by Wen-nas (a division of the Kwantet group), the garments within the range include: coveralls, bib and brace overalls, fleece, foul weather wear, formal shirts and ties.

Background

The UK Eon workforce comprises of: Generation (power stations), Distribution and Retail. Generation employees are supplied with workwear garments from a range of 26 which is currently being rationalised, 99% of which are coveralls incorporating high visibility strips. The Distribution Company (Central Networks) has some 2,500 -3,000 wearers. The Distribution Business is responsible for the distribution of the electricity from the Generators to the meter point of your home. These uniforms are all 100% inherently flame retardant wear and include trousers, polo shirts, sweatshirts, coveralls, foul weather coats. Retail involves the home installation supervisors and members of staff that work within shopping centres, whose uniforms are more about corporate image with grey shirts/blouses, ties, and suits where required.



The Problem

For a business providing uniforms to a proportion of the workforce requiring garments that adhere to PPE requirements, longevity of fabric/garment performance is paramount. This is required for a broad range of roles from working in substations, to being up pylons meaning garments have to offer the required protection such as being flame retardant or high visibility.

For E.ON, even if de-branding was convenient, there is some concern over a secondary market, as they have a very recognisable corporate colour which is on the garments. Due to the nature of the industry, re-branding is frequent, and companies in this sector often change ownership or merge more often than certain other sectors. The most recent occurrence of this for E.ON resulted in the £200,000 worth of redundant clothing.

Due to the varied nature of roles within the organisation, fabric properties and treatments can lead to further difficulty in recovery. For flame retardant garments E.on UK made a decision to have fabric with inherent properties, rather than treated retardancy, leading to high value fabric. They insist that their staff are not able to alter garments, and clothing must be to high specification – shortening of a fire retardant sleeve can cause problems for example.

Even the treated fabrics still need to adhere to corporate image, and this has also been known to create problems. As one arm of an international organisation, E.on are attempting to create a universal range of workwear, but again, due to differing climates in which their employees work, this is found to be taxing.



Uniformreuse is run by the CRR



Drivers

As an organisation they endeavour to dispose of garments appropriately, avoiding sending textiles to landfill as much as possible. The garments from the retail arm of the business could not be passed on for re-use within the EU due to security concerns, and so much of the suitable items are sent to developing nations such as Africa, where security does not present such an issue.

Garments that have not been worn excessively are returned to Wenaas, with the non-intimate garments re-allocated. Focus is also placed on life extension of clothing, particularly higher value protective wear, with repair favoured over replacement of item. In the wider context Eon do consider sustainability, with more expensive, but sustainable fabrics put to a panel for consideration of use in their uniforms. Expense is a major factor however, and if too high, this would act as a hindrance to use.

Initiatives

A pan European working group was set up to develop to design a range of workwear specifically for E.on across the region, which has presented issues in terms of language and understanding. Corporate colours are used across all countries, but there are as yet, no core uniform garment type requirements. Consideration must be given to the garment compositions appropriate to the climatic variations across the organisation.

End-of-life management was not one of the main issues focussed on, but DuPont and Gore-Tex fabrics were selected for their durability with a drive to extend garment life. E.on currently provide linesmen with coverall suits made from Gore-Tex and costing a few hundred pounds- if these get ripped, Wenaas do offer a repair service for them. Both these initiatives were driven by financial incentives rather than directly due to sustainability, though this is also a consideration. One of the garments potentially to be offered are Tencel shirts, made from wood pulp cellulose sourced from sustainable forests, that are 100% biodegradable. This was a decision made from sustainability awareness.

Another universal item produced is a light weight performance jacket made in the corporate orange and grey colours. This garment is available to 'image' (shower/wind proof) or 'protection' (flame retardant and arc proof) specifications. One key aspect of the development of this particular garment is the use of Velcro on the breast area of the jacket where the company logo can be applied using a removable placket. The benefits of using these plackets, is that the same garment can be used a number of times, with the required departmental branding removed and applied as necessary (this has the potential to also be utilised for shirts).

A further achievement of this approach is the fact that this form of branding has been accepted by the tax representative, as the garment is made using the corporate colours. This reduces the need for de-logoing at EoL to some extent.

Additional Information

Websites

E.on web-site www.eon-uk.com

For contact information please search the Directory on www.uniformreuse.co.uk/directory

