

## Media communiqué

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*Initial discussions on the «NanoSafe Textiles» theme held at Empa*

### **How safe are textiles after treatment with nanotechnology-based processes?**

*Nanotechnology offers the textile and clothing industry great opportunities for developing innovative products and expanding into new markets. This is only true, however, if the new technologies represent no health risk to mankind and are harmless to our environment. In order to pave the way for the completely safe use of nanotechnology in the textile branch, in November last year Empa, together with the Swiss Textile Federation (TVS) and the Nano-Cluster Bodensee invited decision-makers from the textile industry, the research sector and the regulatory authorities to the first «NanoSafe Textiles» Dialog meeting. Held at Empa's St. Gall site, more than fifty invitees attended the event.*

All possible risks associated with the treatment of textiles using nanotechnology-based processes must be identified as early as possible, as in fact must also other, risk-free applications of this new technology, according to Markus Rueedi, Member of Empa's Board of Directors, in his opening talk of the seminar. "If this does not take place, then both consumers as well as businesses will become skeptical and lose faith, and the process of innovation will grind to a halt," he added. The head of the Swiss Textile Federation (TVS), Manfred Bickel, reiterated this message. "We want to ensure that our members back the right horse and avoid at all costs the danger that in a few years certain critical nanoproducts will be banned." Joerg Guettinger of the Nano-Cluster Bodensee (an association for the promotion of nano and microtechnology in the Lake Constance region) emphasized the importance of active participation in this context by the significant players in the field.

To kick off the discussion, twelve speakers drawn from various organizations including the governmental authorities (the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH), the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) and the publicly-owned accident insurance company SUVA), the textile industry's value creation chain (including manufacturers, processors and dealers) and the research sector (materials and risk evaluation) furnished the participants with essential background information on the current situation and how future developments may occur. In the discussion which ensued, the following questions (among others) were dealt with in some detail:

- What are the conditions which encourage companies – above all SMEs – to make the decision to become involved with nanotechnology? What requirements, in terms of information and otherwise, do the various players have?
- Where is action necessary in order to guarantee that nanotechnology can be safely used? Who can and should make contributions in this respect (for example by making available certain information).
- “Stringent regulation by the authorities” versus “self regulation by industry with individual responsibility”? What are SMEs attitudes toward a Code of Practice which includes the voluntary monitoring of a firm’s own internal activity? What would a Nano Declaration achieve, where would it be unsuccessful?

A readiness by the participants to search for common solutions became apparent during the discussions. The demand for substantial levels of funding to support risk evaluation and research was also loud and unanimous. In addition there was a consensus that it was important for textile processors to maintain good relationships with their suppliers and that communication within the industry’s value creation chain should be improved. It was also felt, though, that the dialog with customers and with the public needed to be cultivated too. Representatives of textile dealers were of the opinion that a Nano Declaration or appropriate labeling could be helpful, although it was not clear exactly what needed to be declared. An additional point was that since the great majority of textiles were imported, any declaration and labeling obligations needed to be internationally binding.

All in all, the organizers were satisfied with this first act in the NanoSafe Textiles Dialog. “We now need to carry on holding these discussions,” maintained Markus Rueedi, “in order that we can continue in the future to develop – with our partners – safe products which boast high levels of functionality

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Empa Board Member Markus Rueedi.



Manfred Bickel of the Swiss Textile Federation.