

CONTENTS

1. Waistband made of recycled polyurethane for underwear.	P1
2. Pantyhose using biomass polyurethane.	P2
3. Skin-friendly women's innerwear using organic cotton.	P3

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Gunze Limited

In May 2022, Gunze announced its medium-term management plan, "VISION 2030 Stage 1," declaring that it will contribute to society and achieve sustainable growth for Gunze through sustainable management that balances "Social value" and "Economic value".

This newsletter provides information on our sustainable management initiatives. In this 11th issue, we'd like to share with you our efforts in sustainable procurement in the apparel business.

Waistband made of recycled polyurethane for underwear

Sustainable fashion initiatives in the apparel industry are gaining global attention as they aim to reduce environmental impact and improve working conditions. These efforts include the use of recycled materials and organic cotton, product design to reduce waste, and reduced water and energy consumption in the manufacturing process. As a result, many apparel manufacturers are focusing their efforts on researching and using natural and recycled materials that do not use chemicals.

Gunze offers high quality sewing threads and accessories using its proprietary processing technologies with natural materials and recycled synthetic fibers. The company has now developed recycled nylon thread and recycled polyester sewing thread made from recycled PET bottles.

This time, our recycled polyurethane waistband has finally been developed and introduced to the market, despite the difficulties in obtaining a stable supply of recycled raw materials and achieving a high-quality product with the same elasticity as virgin polyurethane fiber.

Gunze will continue to support apparel manufacturers who are exploring the potential of renewable raw materials and promoting environmentally friendly product manufacturing.



Waistband made of recycled polyurethane for underwear

Towards 100% sustainable sewing thread and accessories

Gunze Threads and Accessories Division is committed to advancing sustainable sewing threads, waistbands and other products by utilizing recycled raw materials to effectively meet customer demands. In recent years, robust supply chains have been established for recycled polyester and recycled nylon, facilitating consistent sourcing of high-quality raw materials. However, challenges remain for recycled polyurethane, particularly in its application in elastic waistbands for underwear, where stable supply chains have not yet been secured, leading to initial difficulties in sourcing these materials.

Through continuous technological innovation, Gunze strives to create sustainable products that maintain consistent quality on a global scale, while remaining competitively priced with existing offerings. The company has successfully implemented a manufacturing framework capable of processing recycled raw materials in our five global plants. Gunze is committed to developing products that meet customer needs and aims to fully transition to sustainable materials with reduced environmental impact and recycled components by 2030, while pursuing economic viability.



Mr. Ishikawa, General Manager of Threads and Accessories Division

"SABRINA", which is both environmentally friendly and comfortable to wear, using biomass polyurethan

Gunze's main pantyhose brand "SABRINA" was introduced in 1995 as a new type of pantyhose with the concept of "strong, soft and beautiful". This brand was a new type of stocking utilizing the Zocchi knitting technique, which was rapidly gaining popularity at the time. Since then, the brand has undergone a total of six renewals in its almost 30-year history, always focusing on "comfort, beauty and durability", with the aim of remaining the ultimate standard hosiery of its time. Especially, in response to the growing need to make legs look thinner, the company added compression stockings to its lineup in 2000. Then, in 2009, as the economic outlook became more uncertain and the need for "durability" grew, we added a feature to our stockings that made them less likely to run.

For the 2023 renewal, Gunze shifted to eco-friendly materials in response to growing environmental awareness in recent years and as a shift to materials that can be sustainably sourced in the future. In particular, the company decided to change the main material, polyurethane, in order to create a product with a high level of satisfaction and value for money by making it even "tougher" than before, while maintaining the same wearing comfort.

To provide many customers, especially our loyal customers, with the same comfortable wearing feeling for many years to come, the company decided to convert polyurethane, a petroleum-derived material, to biomass to ensure environmental friendliness and durability of the wearing feeling of the stockings.

Gunze has won the support of many customers by expanding and developing variations to meet the diversification of market needs.



"SABRINA" pantyhose

Balancing customer satisfaction and environmental concerns

At the time of the 2018 renewal, Gunze had already adopted biomass-based polyurethane for some products, and for the 2023 renewal, the company worked with our yarn manufacturer to improve the raw material in order to adopt biomass-based polyurethane for our entire main lineup, with the primary goal of switching to environmentally friendly materials. The company was particularly concerned about the feel of the garments, so we combined multiple yarn processing and knitting conditions, prepared 8 types of stockings for each prototype, and repeatedly measured and evaluated the garments 10 times or more for trial fitting. Through these efforts, we succeeded in developing a product using environmentally friendly biomass polyurethane over a period of five years.

Customer response has been positive, and Gunze expects that the environmentally friendly nature of the product will contribute to its adoption as a standard item by our business partners and consumers in the future.



Mr. Taguchi, Product Planning
Department, Apparel Company

"Fitte", Skin-friendly women's innerwear using organic cotton

In 2011, Gunze launched "KIREILABO", a skin-friendly intimate apparel brand. The brand aims to provide products that pursue women's beauty and comfort, and features items that are particularly comfortable to touch and wear. In 2015, the company revamped its products with the concept of skin-friendly innerwear that is skin-friendly, beautiful, and instantly recognizable its features.

"Fitte" debuted in 2020 as a sub-brand of "KIREILABO", as organic cotton innerwear. The concept is based on the theme of harmony between people and nature, and is an innerwear brand that is gentle to the earth and people, and is sure to make everyday life more enjoyable. The brand was born to target women in their 40s and beyond who are prone to physical changes, but now aims to create products that make all women with skin problems feel cheerful when wearing them. The company also pays special attention to color, focusing on earth tones inspired by nature, and for the Fall/Winter 2024 collection, we added light brown, inspired by the colors of the earth that nature creates over time, to create a soothing, Fitte-like color palette.

Gunze has also made efforts to show photos of the products being worn in a way that is easy to understand, in order to convey the thoughts of the creators to everyone, as it is difficult to understand the features of the product by picking it up in EC sales. As a result of these efforts, "KIREILABO"'s EC sales ratio will increase from 19% in 2019 to 37% in 2023.



"Fitte" Bra tank top

Product development with organic cotton

Gunze chose organic cotton for its "Fitte" collection because of its environmental benefits and health-conscious production standards, which include strict regulations on pesticide use and respect for workers' rights. Organic cotton is not only comfortable in hot weather due to its moisture absorption and breathability, but also provides warmth and moisture retention in colder conditions.

The development process involved significant technological effort to create a stretch cotton blend that hugs the body. Numerous prototypes were created to ensure an attractive bust line without excessive tightness, while minimizing the number of components for improved skin comfort. Balancing the shape and material of the one-piece molded cups proved particularly challenging, but through careful modeling and customer feedback, we finally created a satisfying product.

Understanding that using organic cotton alone would not guarantee customer satisfaction, we focused on achieving a comfortable fit.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many customers commenting on the gentle feel of "Fitte".

Gunze remains committed to producing items that delight its customers.



Mr. Takeshima (left) and Ms. Kawasaki (right),
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