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Primark to improve ethical auditing of suppliers

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03 March 2009 | Jake Kanter

Primark has increased its commitment to ethical trade by signing a deal for a web-based supply chain auditing system.

Under the new scheme, auditors from the clothing giant will assess suppliers and then feed the information into the BSI Management System for managers to view.

Primark, which is owned by Associated British Foods (ABF), said the deal would give greater global "visibility" and management control of the data.

The company has come under intense scrutiny over ethical standards in its supply chain following a series of investigations. In January this year, The Observer and the BBC claimed to have found poor conditions for employees at the retailer's Manchester-based vendor TNS Knitwear.

And last December, workers' rights organisation War on Want alleged employees in a factory in Bangladesh supplying Primark were paid as little as 7p an hour for a week that lasted up to 80 hours.

Primark said it hoped the new system would ensure vendors conformed to its supplier code of conduct, which includes standards on corporate governance, the environment and health and safety. If suppliers did not, the retailer would be able to take remedial action and manage the process through the software.

Ray Ellis, business systems analyst at ABF, said Primark was committed to improving working conditions in its supply chain.

Primark has several hundred independent suppliers based mainly in China and South Asia. It operates 187 stores in the UK, Holland, Spain and Ireland.

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