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New Levi's Production Process Uses 100% Recycled Water

by [Mike Hower](#)

February 25, 2014

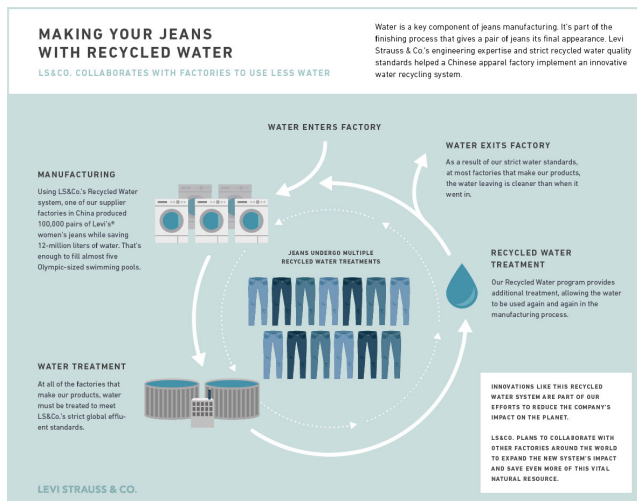


Image credit: [Scout Network Blog](#)

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Levi Strauss has developed a process for using 100 percent recycled water in parts of its jeans production — an industry first — to reduce its impact on the world's water resources, [the Guardian reports](#).

The process is the result of a new third-party water recycling verification that aims to reduce the impact of garment production on fresh water resources. It is being used in one of the company's primary Chinese factories, which bleaches, dyes and stonewashes garments to achieve particular looks or feels.



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Located in southern China, the factory worked with Levi's to engineer a system to pipe 100 percent recycled water into an industrial laundry machine used for finishing one of its jeans lines. The *Guardian* reports that 100,000 pairs have been produced with the new technology to date.

Michael Kobori, Levi's VP of sustainability told the paper that the company looked at EPA guidelines on reuse of water, as well as World Health Organization guidelines on managing wastewater. The company then hired engineers from the textile industry to adapt these general guidelines into a set of standards that can be specifically used in the industry.

While the process is still in the testing phases, the ultimate goal is to use 100 percent recycled water to finish a wider range of Levi's products at factories in other parts of the world, Kobori said.

One of the third parties Levi's asked to verify its process was Gilbert O'Neal,

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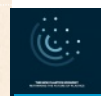


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president of the Institute of Textile Technology. O'Neal has worked with some of the world's largest textile and apparel makers to help them use less water and reduce the level of polluted water discharged.

O'Neal told the *Guardian* that it is possible to finish a garment with recycled water, but the term "100 percent recycled" can be misleading because saying a garment is made from 100 percent recycled water is not the same as saying that 100 percent of the wastewater is recycled.

According to O'Neal, Levi's likely is using 100 percent recycled water, but isn't achieving "zero liquid discharge" — or zero wastewater — the highest standard in industrial water recycling. But the process could reduce the amount of effluent, or waste water, from the factory.

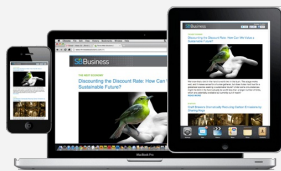
Levi's first raised awareness about water use in the production and care of jeans in 2011 with the launch of its [Water<Less](#) line of jeans — not only were the jeans made with significantly less water during manufacture than traditional jeans, they came with tags guiding consumers on water-conscious ways to care for them. Last year, Levi's launched its [Waste<Less](#) line of denim, which incorporates an average of 8 plastic bottles blended into the fabric, making them soft and flexible. The company's goal was to help cut down on global water bottle waste, which averages 29 liters per person each year.

Water use in textile production has become a topic of increasing concern and action for many brands. In the past few years, sportswear giants Nike and adidas have pioneered new technologies and processes in the interest of saving water, particularly during fabric dyeing: In 2012, adidas released its first waterless-dyed t-shirts that utilized the company's [DryDye technology](#), which uses zero water for dyeing — compared to 25 liters for a typical shirt — and reduces chemical use by 50 percent; and in December, Nike celebrated the opening in Taiwan of its first water-free dyeing facility, featuring equipment that eliminates the use of water and process chemicals from fabric dyeing through its patented [ColorDry process](#).



Mike Hower is Marketing Communications Manager at Carbon Lighthouse. With a background on both sides of the communications podium — as a journalist and strategic communicator — he is committed to helping organizations address climate change through sustainability innovation. Previously... [\[Read more about Mike Hower\]](#)

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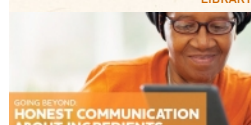
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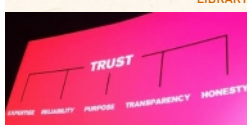
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