

Representing The Wiping Materials, Recycled Clothing, New Textile By Products and Fiber Industries



President's Column

Bill Schapiro

ABC News is Calling

The other day, Bernie told me that ABC News had called and was doing a story on the second-hand clothing industry on the 6:30 pm national news. We all watch the exposes on "Dateline," "20/20," and "Primetime Live." You know, we catch predators, sociopaths, and white collar criminals of all kinds in their nefarious acts and we are informed and entertained at the same time. "I would hate to be that person," we think to ourselves.

We are an industry that does great things. We keep used clothing from the waste stream, we create many jobs both here and in our markets overseas, and we provide good affordable clothing to countries with low per capita incomes. As Bernie is fond of saying whenever he speaks to the press, "This is a win, win, win industry."

So what did ABC ask when they called? "How do you feel about making a profit on goods donated to charities?" the reporter asked. I wanted to say "How does ABC feel about being paid to do the news?" I think Charlie Gibson makes a lot more money than any of our members.

The point is this: We all know what a great industry this is and what great ends it achieves. But the very nature of what we do, the recycling of a product donated to charities, is intrinsically one that can instigate grossly inaccurate and even embarrassing headlines.

In recent years we have forged excellent relationships with, among others, Pietra Rivoli, the Georgetown professor who wrote, [The Travels of a Tee Shirt In the Global Economy](#) and Karen Tramberg Hansen, a professor at Northwestern, who wrote both the book [Salalua](#) as well as the recent article in [Anthropology Today](#) entitled "The Second-Hand Clothing Trade" (August 2004, Vol. 20). SMART also has created The Council on Textile Recycling," a foundation that has produced an excellent video and other materials that can be shown to educate the world as to what we do. In these ways, SMART has ensured that our real story is being portrayed.

So when ABC called, there was no need for panic. We were prepared. Our executive director, Bernie Brill, armed with information we have generated over the years, was able to go to the ABC studios and wave our flag and make our case.

We don't know as of today how ABC will portray the secondhand clothing industry. But what we do know is that we have an organization that represents us all and is ready to present the truth about what we do.

When we try to attract new members, we often point to the tangibles such as SORT, SMARTTRADER and networking. But here is another important reason why we must work together to have a strong trade association: to protect our names and present the integrity of what we do!

ABC News is calling. Put them on. We're ready for them!

(The story aired on December 25.)
