



Turkish firm shifts to laser system to replace sandblasting

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Mürsel Önder, the general manager of Le Faxx, a denim producer in the central Anatolian province of Sivas, replaces the notorious sandblasting system with a 250,000-euro, laser-based technology. AA photo

A denim factory in the Central Anatolian province of Sivas has abolished the sandblasting system that causes denim workers to develop silicosis and silicotuberculosis. The factory, founded in 2005, now employs a laser technology instead that is secure from all such risks.

Mürsel Önder, the general manager of Le Faxx, a denim producer, told the Anatolia news agency that they shifted to the laser system two months ago. He said they brought the technology from the U.K and it them 250,000 euros. He said the laser system protected their workers from developing bad health conditions while increasing production capacity.

“This system helps acquiring the worn-out look remarkably easier than with conventional sandblasting system. Therefore, it helped double our production capacity.”

He said few companies use the laser system in Turkey and they had to bring a technician from Istanbul in order to be able to operate it.

“Sandblasting causes silicosis and many other lung diseases due to tiny dust particles. But the laser system employs its own ventilation system that vacuums up the dust before it spreads in the air. We are protecting our workers from exposure to dust. We attach great importance to guaranteeing healthy working conditions for them,” he said.



Particularly underlining the advantages of the laser system in terms of the business aspects, Önder said, "Both in legal and moral terms, the laser system is the best option for employees' health. This system creates smoke as it burns, but the well-designed ventilation system absorbs the smoke immediately to the extent that you can't even smell it."

He said the smoke was vacuumed out of the cabin through the ventilation system, adding that the laser system did not even require the use of masks. The system also reduces the risk of mistakes since it is not run manually. "Therefore, by reducing the waste due to employee mistakes it will compensate for the money spent on its purchase."

The laser system's technician, Hakan Yalibağı, recalled that the sandblasting practice was banned and the whole sector had to shift to the laser technology anyway.

The most common occupational lung disease in the world, silicosis is often contracted by workers engaged in sandblasting jeans without proper ventilation or protection. It is non-curable and can be fatal. According to medical reports from Turkey, sandblasting operators can develop an acute form of silicosis in just six to 24 months of work.

An increasingly popular practice over the past 20 years, sandblasting is used in many different denim-producing countries as a finishing method to produce a faded look for jeans and other clothing products.

Workers have called on major brands to immediately stop the use of sandblasting throughout their supply chains; on national governments to not allow sandblasting in denim production; on the International Labor Organization and World Health Organization to include denim-production chains in their global programs to eradicate silicosis; on the multi-stakeholder and business initiatives dealing with labor standards in the garment industry to use their influence to convince their members to ban sandblasting; on consumers to refrain from buying sandblasted jeans; and on designers to stop proposing fashion trends that lead to the use of unsafe and potentially fatal techniques such as sandblasting.