

TAKING ON THE WORLD

The new Urbanshade+ fabric from Shaw, which combines eco and design credentials with high performance flame retardant attributes, looks set to make significant inroads into the global market. As WFA discovered, the fabric owes its success to serious innovation smarts and investment in technological development.

URBANSHADE+ IS BORN

Like so many ground-breaking advances, the arrival of innovative fabric, Urbanshade+ came about as a result of a gap in the market. As Shaw's John Baguley confirms, the company's commercial team (headed by Baguley himself) had identified unmet market demand for an environmentally friendly fabric with strong aesthetic qualities and high performance flame retardant attributes.

"Shaw's highly successful Urbanshade goes a long way to meeting this need, including the US Greenguard certification, but stops short with regard to environmental attributes," says Baguley. Hence the investment in new technology to deliver Urbanshade+, which will be launched at R&T Stuttgart, and rolled out in the Australian domestic market throughout 2015.

Research + development

Urbanshade+ is a result of two years' collaboration between Shaw Australia's chemists, Martin Short and Chris Zoch and the manufacturing team headed by Martin in Shaw NZ.

"The team have achieved their brief to develop a performance flame retardant fabric that meets international FR standards and the high levels of sustainability demanded by Oeko-Tex," says Baguley.

"Shaw's adoption of a 'green' FR system represents a significant change to the existing Urbanshade offer," he adds.

The new system uses environmentally friendly chemicals and raw materials which are: Halogen free (halogenated chemical components are associated with longevity in the environment and interference with human hormones), have no Antimony (toxic metal) content, and no Nonylphenol Ethoxylates (NPE) surfactants.

From a technical perspective, the new FR system has an improved FR performance in terms of char length, after burn, and smoke emission, (all to be verified by external third party testing, by the time this article goes to press.)

Baguley adds that Urbanshade+ flocked backing has the same soft to touch and easy handling currently held by its predecessor. The new backing was designed with conformance to the United States 'Living Building' compositional requirements, as well as California Proposition 65 (which requires the State to publish a list of chemicals known to cause cancer, birth defects or other reproductive harm), ultimately meeting the requirements of the United States EPA Design for the Environment (DFE) certification, and potentially Oeko-Tex certification.

International promise

Baguley says Urbanshade+'s product development has been driven by international markets, extending beyond the United States, where Shaw already has an established market, to capture new business in Europe. "The original Urbanshade is already having success in the UK, selling to via UK distributor Alutrade."

"Urbanshade+ is also set to bolster Shaw's sales to the Asian market, including Japan and Hong Kong, where stringent accreditation attributes are required before a fabric is specified.

Shaw plans that the FR system will be applied to other fabrics across the Shaw range, and is already delivering Aston+ a wide width jacquard with flocked backing, and FR to international standards, to the Japanese market.

The arrival of Urbanshade+ appears to be timely, with demand for safe, non-toxic fabrics, clearly on the rise. "Shaw's research shows that the Australian and New Zealand market, once content to accept the less stringent AS1530 Part III test, is now more discerning. In particular in New Zealand there is a demand for AS1530 Part II, a more stringent test," says Baguley.

"This trend isn't limited to the commercial sphere either; consumers have become increasingly educated in the products they purchase for their homes, so their demand is on the rise, for authenticity and reducing the impact of their product choices on their families' wellbeing. As a result, Shaw's launch campaign theme [featured on this edition's front cover] is strongly oriented to the end consumer."

With Shaw also in discussions with top manufacturing retailers, who are keen to gain exclusivity for Urbanshade+'s launch year, the outlook for the fabric is undoubtedly promising.

"Urbanshade+ will be launched at R&T Stuttgart, and rolled out in the domestic market throughout 2015. The fabric already has significant interest in the United States, for forward orders in standard and customer colours," says Baguley.

"We're confident that Urbanshade+ ticks a number of boxes that few other fabrics in the market do. The already significant interest in this innovative fabric is proof of that."

