



REDUCE



REUSE



RECYCLE

# LOWA'S BUSINESS PRACTICES

## A TRADITION OF SENSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE MANUFACTURING



Building boots in Jetzendorf, Bavaria.

**WE PRODUCE 95% OF OUR FOOTWEAR IN THE CENTER OF EUROPE. WE HAVE TO FOLLOW THE STRICTEST ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS WORLDWIDE. WE BUY OUR MATERIALS FROM EUROPEAN SUPPLIERS WHO HAVE TO FOLLOW THE SAME RULES WHEN PRODUCING THEIR MERCHANDISE.**

**OVERVIEW.** The ideal shoe would be made of just one environmentally friendly material, would be simple to manufacture, without any glue or thread or metal hardware, but still offer all the comfort, protection, support and design variety we expect. *This ideal shoe/material does not exist.* Yet we know that simply using laces made of hemp doesn't make a shoe "green." We believe that consumers are sharp, skeptical and looking for authentic business practices – not a green-washing of the facts.

We also know that natural materials like hemp or bamboo aren't necessarily "carbon neutral" in the way they're produced, treated or transported. It always depends on how many resources are needed in production and how much impact the finished product has on the environment.

Of course we could make some compromises and reduce the amount of different materials to the minimum, but who would choose to wear espadrilles or Greek leather sandals or molded EVA clogs on a mountain? No customer, even the most environmentally conscious one, would accept this solution for rugged outdoor footwear.

Modern hiking shoes are expected to fit, resist, cushion, absorb moisture, support, grip, handle water/mud/snow and more. To solve this we have to deal with many different materials: leathers, different type of plastics and rubbers, metals, glues. And of course, we have to responsibly manage the way these materials are produced and then put together.

**REDUCE – REUSE – RECYCLE.** Those are words that everyone is familiar with these days. But which word out of that mantra is generally overlooked? *Reduce.* Fact is, LOWA Boots by virtue of their inherent design attributes, the materials

used and the craft that goes into them, last much longer than comparable hiking boots and consequently consume only about half the resources along the production and distribution food chain. One end result is that fewer LOWAs end up in the landfill/waste stream.

The average pair of LOWA boot lasts 5-7 years on average. Why? Because of the high quality of materials and workmanship, along with the fact that we have never pursued "light weight" at the expense of losing durability and performance. We have countless letters from happy customers who report on how long they've had their boots, how many miles they've logged (in many cases, thousands) and how thrilled they are to have boots that they can resole, repair and keep going well into a second decade, in some cases.

**SUSTAINABILITY.** Don't soil your nest. Every healthy animal knows that. Until recently, most humans have followed that same logic. Certainly most traditional communities, including the thousands of towns and villages throughout Europe, are organized to keep inhabitants healthy and the surrounding fields, woods and waterways clean. Sustainability has been a central guiding tenet for LOWA, simply because it makes sense to us to keep our nest clean for our families. (LOWA's factory in Jetzendorf is literally in the middle of the village, surrounded by fields of our neighbors' grazing dairy cattle.)

Since we produce 95% of our footwear in the center of Europe, we have to follow the strictest environmental laws worldwide. We buy our materials from European suppliers who have to follow the same rules when producing their merchandise. It's also important to note that LOWA ships most of its product within Europe, as opposed to shipping huge amounts overseas. Keeping most of our business (roughly 80%) on the Continent means that overall we use less energy to transport our goods to their final destinations.



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Our workers are also our neighbors. We are all invested in the health of our community. From top to bottom: tanned hides from non toxic agents, filtration system at our factory (notice the clean running stream on our property), shoe fabrication and quality inspection.

**WE ARE A WORLDWIDE COMPANY ON ALL LEVELS, BUT WE STILL BUILD 95% OF OUR PRODUCTS IN EUROPE.**

Our business practices demand that we reduce, separate and recycle all waste, to reduce any hazardous substances or solvents in production to an absolute limit and to filter the rest. We know that we are measured and controlled regularly by government officials and must be involved in the constant improvement of environmental standards. We are not only subject to the stringent controls that the European Union insists on for manufacturing, we have voluntarily added extremely efficient evaporation systems for solvents and to filter the air completely. So the cows who drink from the stream behind our factory stay healthy, not to mention our workers, neighbors and families.

No cow is destroyed because we need its skin. The skins we source are from cattle bred for meat production and the hide is actually slaughterhouse waste. Reusing the skins means that we don't have to produce another material.

Tanning means adding a chemical substance to the skin fiber to avoid rotting and decomposition. These agents have to be securely fixed to the fiber and the rest has to be washed out again, filtered and recycled. The agent we use, chrome 3, is considered non-toxic, but can change its molecular structure under certain circumstances into the highly poisonous chrome 6 ("hexavalent chrome"). Every tannery we buy leather from has to have a closed-chromium-loop-system so no "unstable" (meaning not securely attached to a leather fiber) chrome 3 can leave the plant and possibly transform to chrome 6.

Our leathers are manufactured in Germany and Italy, where the tanneries have to have their own sewage plants and the (small amount of) sewage sludge goes to hazardous waste disposal facilities. They are under consistent control of government regulating agencies.

In 1992 we changed from fluid glues to spray glues which has resulted in a 70% reduction in the amount of solvents needed. This has literally

saved tons of solvents every year. We continue to utilize more and more water-based glues, which inherently produce fewer toxic by-products.

- Our leathers are free of PCP (pentachlorophenol – mostly used in leathers to avoid fungus on long transport).
- We don't use any PVC in our boots.
- We don't use azo dyes, which could cause cancer when reacting with sweat and moisture.
- All materials, especially foams, are CFC-free ("CFC-free" means specifically that the product does not contain or use chlorofluorocarbons and is therefore "ozone safe.")
- All glues are free of toluene (a cheap solvent for glues). Toluene is considered a probable carcinogen.
- Our boxes are made of recycled paper—and have been for the past 20 years. All marketing materials like catalogues are printed on recycled paper with soy based inks. We endeavor to use digital media as much as possible.

There are some products that we can't build in Europe, such as running shoes and sport sandals. In these cases, the materials (such as the EVA necessary to create lightweight midsoles) and pricing demands require that we build them in Asia. We are working with our Asian partners to continually improve their manufacturing processes and workplace standards, so that no underage workers are employed, and that all manufacturing waste is disposed of properly. They are also working to reduce the amount of glues and to mitigate the effects of solvents.

We are committed to continually improving our own standards and practices as well. LOWA Boots will continue to be produced with every effort to creating the highest quality, most durable boots possible with an eye to clean production and sensible, sustainable practices.

# LOWA

Outdoor & Ski Boots

[www.lowaboos.com](http://www.lowaboos.com)