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Asos and Primark set out new green pledges

By Beth Timmins - Business reporter, BBC News 16 September 2021

Fashion firms Asos and Primark have announced new sustainability commitments, with both saying they will keep prices affordable.

Asos says it is aiming to achieve a net-zero impact on the environment by 2030.

Primark says its clothes will be made using recycled or "more sustainably sourced materials" by the same date. The budget retailer has also promised to halve carbon emissions across its operations. Critics warned, however, that these goals will be hard to track as fast-fashion supply chains often lack transparency.

On Thursday, Asos set out new environmental and social targets. They include:

- Reducing carbon emissions generated by its clothes production and deliveries
- Ensuring all of its own-brand products are made from sustainable or recycled materials by 2030
- Giving customers more information on its supply chain
- Recruiting a more diverse workforce, including 50% female representation across its leadership team

Its chief executive, Nick Beighton, told the BBC's Today programme: "We need to work with our partners on this to offset any minimal cost increases we anticipate from doing this."

He added that he expects more consumers to choose to shop with Asos based on those commitments.

"The responsibility for a sustainable future lies with all of us and businesses must lead the way," he said.

In a statement, Primark also said it would design its clothes to be more durable so they can be recycled and last longer - without increasing its prices.

It said it would "pursue a living wage for workers in its supply chain", but did not specify how much this wage would be in the countries where it has employees or when this would happen. Primark has 397 stores across 14 countries and employs about 70,000 people.

The company's chief executive, Paul Marchant, said: "Sustainability shouldn't be priced at a premium that only a minority can afford. "Because of who we are, we believe we have the opportunity to make more sustainable fashion choices affordable to all."

Primark said it would eliminate single-use plastics in its own operations, but it does not own the majority of factories which manufacture its clothes.

Entry-price T-shirts

However, Noelle Hatley, lecturer in fashion business at Manchester Metropolitan University's Fashion Institute, said that using language such as "ambitions" and "pursuing" was vague.

"They need to be setting measurable targets, how many suppliers and factories and by what date will living wages be paid?"

Over the next year, Primark said it would make all men's, women's and kids' entry price point T-shirts from sustainably sourced cotton.