

Investigation of Bangladeshi Leather Industry Speeds Shutdown of One of World's Ten Most Polluted Places

Transparentem is an independent, philanthropically funded nonprofit organization that uses front-line investigative methods to identify environmental and human rights abuses in global supply chains. Our mission is to advance the well-being of workers and their communities by exposing hard truths to those with the power to positively transform industries. Our primary objective is to be a catalyst for systemic change and work with diverse stakeholders, including brands and manufacturers, to eradicate those environmental and human rights abuses, and promote supply chain accountability.

Transparentem's initial two-year investigation of leather tanneries in Hazaribagh, Bangladesh, documented widespread abuses, including gross environmental degradation, child labor, and hazardous working conditions. Those abuses directly affected some 30,000 workers and indirectly affected hundreds of thousands more people in surrounding areas.

Transparentem scrutinized the links between Hazaribagh tanneries, or their apparently affiliated manufacturers, and eleven US and European companies. Beginning in October 2016, we presented individualized Primary Intelligence Notes (PINs) to those brands and retailers. We carefully described what we did and did not know about how much, if any, leather from Hazaribagh may have wound up in their footwear or handbags. Most of these brands and retailers took swift action, starting in the grace period. We began to [disclose](#) the consolidated reports, noting brand and retailer response, in late March 2017.

For forty years, this cluster of more than 150 tanneries harbored grave human rights abuses, and was known as one of the world's ten most polluted places. On April 8, 2017, the Government of Bangladesh [enforced](#) a Supreme Court order to close down Hazaribagh's wet tanning operations and cut water, electricity and gas to the tanneries. The action was a vital step toward the industry's relocation to a more sustainable tannery estate in Savar.

The Bangladeshi government and leather industry still must overcome [significant challenges](#) before they fully protect the people and environment in and around Hazaribagh and Savar. We will continue to monitor the remediation and restoration process as that industry settles into its new home.

See also this AP News [article](#) for additional information about this project.