

March 1970

In March 1970, the Canadian Government Specifications Board (CGSB) released 86-GP-1, *Standard for Labelling of Textiles*. The standard applied “to a system of symbols for permanently labelling textiles to indicate suitable ‘care’ procedures for restoring them.” However, the use of care symbols, though widely adopted, **was not legally mandatory in Canada**. But if a manufacturer chose to use the system, the rules of the *Standard* were to be followed.

Thus, while care symbols can be used to help date a vintage item manufactured or sold in Canada, *the absence of care symbols has no meaning whatsoever*. Moreover, enforcement was lax, and I have found imported items with colored care symbols but the symbols themselves are a mix of Canadian and foreign symbols.

The Canadian system used a “traffic light” coloring scheme: green indicated the procedure was safe, yellow indicated the use of caution, and red indicated the procedure was prohibited. Red symbols were also required to have an “X” placed over them for emphasis.

The order of appearance on a label was: wash, bleach, dry, iron, and dry clean.

A label did not require the inclusion of all symbols, but anything prohibited was required.

The material for the label was to have the same color fastness and stability properties as the textile it was attached to, so as to remain in good condition throughout the life of the textile. This was more theory than practice, though, as many of us who collect vintage can attest to.

The 1970 symbols were as follows:

Washing:



Bleaching:



Drying:



Ironing:

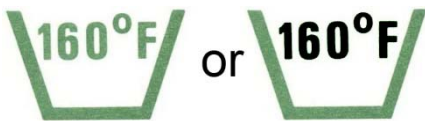


Dry Cleaning:



July 1973:

The supplementary information in the **washtub** – the temperature and hand – could now be in either the same color as the symbol OR in any suitable darker color, except red, so as to improve legibility:



The **iron symbol** could now be in colored outline instead of solid, and the supplementary information could be in the same color or a darker color except red:



Thus, if you find a green washtub with the temperature or the hand in a color other than green, or you find an iron in outline with the temperature written inside, this indicates no earlier than July 1973 and more likely a little bit later, as it would have taken time for manufacturers to adapt to the changes.

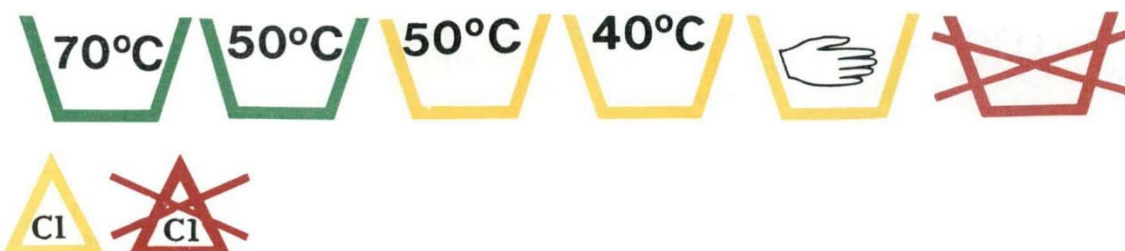
June 1975:

June 1975 saw the introduction of a **green 120° washtub**. The green 120° washtub meant the textile could be washed at 120° at normal agitation; the amber 120° washtub now meant the textile required reduced agitation.



December 1979:

Canada converted to the metric system, so temperatures were now in **Celsius**. Supplementary information was now in the same color or in any suitable dark color except amber and red for green symbols, green and red for amber symbols, and amber and green for red symbols. For ease of use, supplementary information was often found in black:





Another important change was that ironing temperatures could now be expressed in degrees Celsius OR in dots:



OR



Dry cleaning remained the same:



Additional information, in text only, could be added and had to be in both English and French. For example: “Wash separately/laver seul” or “Commercial dry cleaning only/faire nettoyer à sec”.

If for a valid reason a departure from the normal requirements of color fastness or shrinkage was required, a text explanation was required. For example: “colors may fade/les couleurs peuvent pâlir”.

March 1983:

It was no longer required to specify prohibited actions, though this remained “desirable”. For example, a dry-clean-only textile would bear a green dry-cleaning symbol but would not be required to include a red washing symbol, though such inclusion was desirable. Thus, consumers could no longer assume that the absence of a symbol indicated a care procedure could be safely used.

December 1991:

The only significant change (for our purposes) in 1991 was the addition of the amber 30°C washtub:



2003:

In December 2003, as a result of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Canada abandoned colored symbols and adopted a system that harmonized the US ASTM symbols (first developed in 1996) with the EU’s ISO system. That said, on EU clothing labels you may find the ISO symbols, while other labels use the “NAFTA” symbols. This can be particularly confusing as clothing imported by resellers (such as Winners) are not required to change the original care symbols of the country the item was initially intended for, only to indicate the importation with a CA sticker.

Note also that while the Standards were revised every few years, this does not mean the symbols themselves changed; often revisions were only about the interpretation of a symbol or the wording in the document. Care symbols were now usually in black but could be in any color.

ASTM NAFTA symbols:

Machine wash	Machine wash, permanent press	Machine wash, delicate	Hand wash	Do not wash	Bleach	Do not bleach	Non-chlorine bleach	Non-chlorine bleach
Water temperature 30°C	Water temperature 40°C	Water temperature 50°C	Water temperature 60°C	Water temperature 70°C	Water temperature 95°C	Iron	Do not iron	No steam
Water temperature 30°C	Water temperature 40°C	Water temperature 50°C	Water temperature 60°C	Water temperature 70°C	Water temperature 95°C	Low temperature	Medium temperature	High temperature
Tumble dry	Low heat	Medium heat	High heat	No heat	Permanent press	Delicate	Hang to dry	Drip dry
Short cycle	Reduced moisture	Low heat	No steam finishing	Dry	Dry flat	Dry in the shade	Do not dry	Do not tumble dry
Do not dryclean	Dryclean	Any solvent	Any solvent except tetrachlorethylene	Petroleum solvent only	Wet cleaning	Do not wet clean	Do not bleach	Do not wring