



Backgrounder: Use of DWR Treatments in Outdoor Products

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Background

Perfluorinated chemicals, or PFCs, are a broad class of chemicals used in a wide variety of applications. Certain formulations of PFC's are utilized across the outdoor industry and other industries as treatments for textiles to enhance water, oil and stain/soil repellency. These chemicals are commonly referred to as Durable Water Repellency (DWR) treatments.

DWR treatments have long been known for their advanced performance in this area and are widely used by the outdoor industry in apparel, footwear, backpacks, tents, sleeping bags and other categories of technical products where getting wet is undesirable or even life-threatening. Concerns have been raised about the possible discharge of PFCs, specifically substances referred to as PFOA and PFOS, because of their persistent, bio-accumulative and toxic properties.

There is a history of engagement between the business community and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on this issue. In 2006, the U.S. EPA and eight major chemical companies together launched the PFOA Stewardship Program, with the goals of reducing global facility emissions and product content of PFOA and related chemicals by 95 percent by 2010 and working toward eliminating emissions and product content by 2015.

The Outdoor Industry and Chemicals Management

In May 2011, the OIA Sustainability Working Group launched its Chemicals Management Working Group (CMWG) to collaboratively address chemicals management challenges within the shared global supply chains for outdoor products. The group currently includes more than 100 participants, including members of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition and the European Outdoor Group.

In early August 2012, the CMWG, in partnership with the Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC) group of brands as well as the European Outdoor Group, began a coordinated effort to specifically explore the use of DWR in its shared global supply chains.

Shared goals of this group include:

- Providing outdoor and apparel companies with education around the properties of various chemical treatments, to establish a shared baseline of understanding within the industry;
- Collecting information from brands, chemical companies, material manufacturers and industry associations on existing chemical treatment options;
- Establishing a shared landscape of chemical treatment use cases and performance requirements; and,
- Ultimately seeking to replace existing chemistries with less hazardous alternatives, while upholding necessary performance requirements.

For more information about these efforts, please contact Beth Jensen, OIA's director of corporate responsibility, at bjensen@outdoorindustry.org.