

## Insulated Garments in a Climate Change World

The lifestyle trade show formerly known as Outdoor Retailer saw a new act emerge at center ring recently. It has all the themes the industry has come to expect; natural vs. synthetic materials, American ingenuity vs. massive Asian infrastructure, small nimble companies up against global apparel giants. Insulation is the soup d'jour and outdoor brands are rushing to establish their positions, and trademarks, while the technologies that make it all possible are being hurried to the consumer marketplace.

To begin with, it's odd to see insulation become an industry focus in a climate change world. That, I suppose, we can attribute to the success of the ubiquitous little quilted jacket. No longer your parent's dog-fleece; the little puffy jacket can be thrown on to replace a sweater, it is inexpensive and it comes in brightly colored nylon. This isn't outerwear in the traditional sense, but rather the modern mid-layer gone wild.

The wave of quilted garments has yet to crest and already a zillion sub-species exist. Down, technical down, hydrophobic down, down with ceramic fibers mixed in, all join infinite versions of synthetic nonwovens to create an endless stream of slick little insulators. Confusion reigns.

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Into the midst of this scene enters Alpha.

Give Polartec credit, they looked at a specialty fleece market being eaten alive by these insulated jackets and asked how a fabric mill might respond. The resulting product has turned the category upside-down. Be it by

design or just the happy accident of making lemonade from circular knitting machines, Polartec created an 'insulation' that changed the game; it doesn't of need to be used in conjunction with down-proof materials. There aren't any migration issues with Alpha, and that opens the door to

a wide variety of more breathable shell / lining options.

"They can wear that jacket all day. Once you build up heat you don't feel like you need to take the jacket off. Hot air is going to go right through it," says Samantha Killgore, Rab.

This is where trend and climate converge. The background story is the outdoor industry has been responding to climate change for quite some time. Like the big apparel players, they are making garments for the shoulder seasons, spring and fall, where there is the widest spectrum of use. These garments are defined by a single, simple idea, ventilation. Breathable garments are both more comfortable and more relevant to our lives, and Alpha fits into that model.

Garments that are adapted to real world conditions let the heat out and allow the body to naturally cool itself. That's half of the formula for comfort, and the attributes that surround that idea are becoming paramount to protection. The Outdoor Industry has changed its narrow view of performance to include more than securing the human body against the forces of nature, now the goal includes cooperation between physiology and environment. I believe the word is synergy. ●