

GOING GREEN

Sustainable technologies provided the main focus for buyers at the Outdoor Retailer Winter Market '07. **Kathlyn Swantko** reports.



Environmentally-responsible, eco-friendly, sustainability, green, hybrid ... no matter what words are used to describe the movement, it is clear that everyone attending this season's Outdoor Retailer Show is on the same page, and the green market is undoubtedly here to stay.

The first Winter Market in the expanded Salt Palace Convention Center, in Salt Lake City, Utah, was held from January 27 - 30, and hosted a record 17,973 attendees, up 24% from 2006. The remodelled Salt Palace showcased a total of 815 exhibitors, including 274 new exhibitors and 152 expanded booth presentations.

Peter Devin, group show director for Outdoor Retailer, could reflect on a resounding success: "There was a great deal of energy throughout the entire show. The increase in floor space, new exhibitors, and attending buyers all signalled a healthy show, and we were grateful for the opportunity to host this vibrant marketplace."

Sustainable products was the central theme of the show, with many exhibitors illustrating their expansion into eco-friendly products. Even the supplier exhibitors responded to the focus with new offerings of sustainable fabrics.

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI), a new exhibitor at the show, introduced 17 products that offer special technologies for the active outdoor customer. AWI said that it is committed to providing innovative Merino fabrics to the market, and to bringing wool back to outdoor active wear.

"In the early 1990s, wool was the main fibre of the outdoor activewear segment before synthetics were introduced," Jimmy Jackson, global product development manager at AWI, said. "Many outdoor enthusiasts remember this, and the performance attributes of the fibre. The collection we are showing will truly demonstrate the beneficial qualities of Australian Merino wool as a highly adaptable fibre for ultimate lightweight active goods, from performance to durable outdoor apparel."



The Transpor booth saw countless visitors keen to see the company's on-site moisture management technology, Transpor dry layer, being tested.

The products in the spotlight at the winter OR fell into three categories: Merino Climate, with thermal technologies for maintaining a comfortable body temperature; Merino Stretch, for comfort and maintaining the shape of the garment; and Merino Protect, which offers nano-tech antibacterial technology, insect repellent attributes and UV protection.

FiberVisions, one of the world's largest producers of polyolefin staple fibres showcased its new fibre, Coolvisions, which it claims to be the industry's first disperse dyeable polypropylene fibre. FiberVisions said that as well as the appealing piece-dye qualities of the fibre, Coolvisions also maintains the additional performance qualities of polypropylene that are perfect for the outdoor performance market. It is lightweight, breathable, durable, stain resistant and fast-drying, with thermal regulation qualities. The disperse dyeing technology can be used for both knit and woven fabrics.

Dri-release featured two new developments: Dri-release bamboo and DriFIRE. Dri-release bamboo is the latest addition to the Dri-release family of natural fibres to be blended with the patented, co-polymer Dri-release polyester fibres in order to accelerate the water release rate of

wet fabric. Dri-release bamboo combines the softness of bamboo fibre with the beneficial performance qualities of the Dri-release technology.

Optimer Performance Fibers, makers of Dri-release, developed DriFIRE, performance FR (flame resistant) wear in response to the needs of the military in Iraq. Safety Systems, a leading provider of tactical equipment and apparel to the military, law enforcement, fire and industrial markets, needed a new solution for a lightweight, comfortable, next to the skin, moisture management base layer fabric that was flame resistant. Polyester-based fabrics were unsuitable, because they melted and dripped onto the skin, causing burns. The solution was DriFIRE.

Beth Moore, managing director of operations at Optimer, said: "It took two years in development, but the result was everything that Safety Systems wanted. In addition to its typical moisture management capabilities, the new Dri-release FR version is not only self-extinguishing, it quickly turns to ash, and does not melt or drip."

Of The Earth, established in 1992, is dedicated to the concept that fine organic and alternative fibre apparel is the wave of the future, and now finds itself a leading figure of the sustainable

movement. The company manufacturers baby, children's, men's, and women's activewear and casual lifestyle apparel, as well as home textile products. The success of its husband and wife team, Hélene Bisnaire and Richard Ziff, represents the fulfillment of a personal dream to bring organic sustainable products to the world's market. As part of this philosophy, the company offers a wide range of fabrics, including organic cotton and other natural fibres, soy and bamboo, and fabrics made from recycled plastic soda bottles.

Ziff, Of The Earth president and CEO, said: "While there was a short-lived trend in sustainability that occurred during the mid-90s, it looks like this current interest in earth-friendly products is here to stay. It was very exciting to see the widespread interest throughout the four days of the OR show."

At this season's show, Of The Earth showcased a variety of knitted and crocheted sweaters and knitted apparel, made



Organic beanie (above) and Zebra (left) hats from Chaos' Moon Shadow fall/winter '07 collection, which has been produced by a women's knitting co-operative in the highlands of Peru using local alpaca fibres.

from bamboo, soy, organic merino wool, organic cotton, and hemp for its fall '07 sweater collection. With joint-venture relationships with certified organic farms, mills and factories in China, the company maintains a consistent supply of raw materials.

Chaos is another manufacturer that has followed the organic mantra in its line of knitted hats. At this season's OR, the

company featured natural linens, cotton and hemp blends, achieving amazing colour through the use of natural reactive vegetable dyes.

"The dye programme has been in the development stages for three years," Beth Cochran, spokesperson

for Chaos, said. "The consumer is now ready, and has been asking for these sustainable, earth-friendly designs."

According to Cochran, the company is also expanding its Moon Shadow collection of "Knitters Guild" hats from Peru. The collection is supplied by a women's knitting

co-operative in the highlands of Peru, with the women coming from 25 remote villages that surround the city of Cusco near Machu Pichu. Local alpaca fibres are used for the Chaos designs. "Chaos' new Moon Shadow collection is constructed with the young, hip skier/snowboarder in mind, between 17 – 28 years of age," Cochran said. "These young, fresh styles are trendy as well as functional, utilizing a Polartec fleece lining."

Transpor dry layer is a moisture management technology that has been on the market for several years, and has become increasingly important. This new exhibitor at the OR Show saw its booth packed with interested attendees eager to see the on-site moisture management testing being conducted in the booth. Utilizing the SDL Atlas MMT fabric-testing machine, Transpor personnel compared the moisture management qualities of Transpor to a wide range of competitors.

Mark Cashin, president of Transpor, said: "We have compiled data from every major competitor, and have proven that Transpor wicks better and maintains a dry layer next to the skin. Transpor Dry Layer has the data to back up its performance claims. We invite our customers to go beyond wicking moisture, and check the moisture transport of their products compared to Transpor Dry Layer." **KI**



Optimer Fibers' Dri-release bamboo knit fabric combines the softness of bamboo fibre with the beneficial performance qualities of Dri-release technology.