Modified technologies, sustainability and Made in the USA were hot topics at Outdoor Retailer Winter Market 2013. Kathy Swantko reports from Salt Lake City.

OVER 2000 NEW products were launched at the winter edition of the US show Outdoor Retailer in January by a record 950 branded manufacturers and 177 new exhibitors. “The new product launches in the backcountry winter sports market fired up the energy and passion of the industry, as the outdoor market looks to expand its influence to a broader audience,” said OR show director Kenji Haroutunian.

The ‘Made in the USA’ campaign was a key issue as many companies view this as a potential way of expanding the outdoor apparel industry, creating new jobs and ultimately improving the US economy as a whole. “The entire garment process needs to be seamless and made in the USA,” said Nick Brayton, president of Woolrich, the 183-year-old Pennsylvania based woolen mill. “The outdoor industry has the initiative to do this! It’s about everybody doing it together - a holistic approach.”

Sustainability also remained a strong influence for both supplier and branded-manufacture exhibitors, with much attention being paid to the recent publication of the recent Greenpeace report on sustainable alternatives to PTFE. The report focused on tests that detected perfluorinated toxins on outdoor clothing. Because of this publication, there was a renewed emphasis by a number of supplier exhibitors on eco-friendly alternatives to fluorocarbon coatings and finishes used in outdoor apparel.

Future Materials reviews several of the new additions and modified textile products that were showcased by supplier exhibitors at ORWM’13.

Fibres/Fabrics:
Cordura Lite Plus Fabrics is a new fabric line, developed by Invista’s Cordura brand fabric division. This woven fabric, made using the highest tenacity Type 749 yarns in various combinations ranging from 210 denier/68 filament to 525 denier/140 filament. The new Cordura Lite Plus Fabrics have 12% higher tensile strength and contain two times more individual yarn filaments when compared to Cordura Lite fabric. The higher filament counts allow for increased natural fabric coverage in weaving, resulting in a smoother/softer hand, along with improved water/air leakage with less coating required. Potential constructions include lightweight rip stops, dobby’s, and plain weaves, targeted at end-use applications such as technical packs, daypacks and luggage.

Outlast PCM fiberfill, developed by Outlast Technologies, is the first PCM (phase change material) for bedding. The fiberfill utilises Outlast’s recently launched first PCM polyester fibre, which can be easily blended with other fibres, and is suited for bedding products with synthetic fillings. The result is a soft bedding product that also provides an ideal comfort climate by helping to balance temperature and humidity levels during the night. The Outlast technology works continuously to manage heat and moisture, while reducing sweat production, so less humidity is created inside the bed. Targeted end-use applications for Outlast PCM fiberfill include fillings for duvets, pillows and sleeping bags.

Membranes/Laminates:
SympaTex highlighted its PTFE-free and
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PFC-free, 100% recyclable membrane, made of environmentally harmless polyether/ester (a combination of polyester and polyether molecules). The membrane is Bluesign approved and Oeko-Tex Standard 100 certified. SympaTex also provides a fluorocarbon-free DWR (durable water repellent) treatment, which meets the criteria of being 100% waterproof and windproof, and has optimal breathability without ecological compromises. Fluorocarbons have been used in the production of DWR treatments for more than 30 years, and these substances degrade very slowly in the environment. SympaTex has proven that high tech and environmental protection can complement each other within a functional textile.

Leather:
WR100 Extreme is a new high performance leather developed by Pittards that goes a step beyond Pittards’ WR100 in water resistant technology. The new leather variant (Mukluk), created initially for military use in arctic conditions, delivers footwear leather performance for the most demanding environments. WR100 Extreme takes leather performance into the outdoor market, by providing advanced outdoor protection and warmth in extreme cold and wet weather conditions. The leather qualities of WR100 Extreme include warmth retention, outstanding water resistance, fast drying, and breathability. The targeted end-use is footwear applications.

Technologies/Finishes:
Solar+, a new Schoeller technology, helps textiles of any colour to better absorb the sun’s heat rays. Solar+ allows even thin fabrics to provide more warmth. The technology improves the body’s heat management for a higher degree of comfort and performance. Solar+ works especially well on high-pressure days when it is sunny and cold. The benefits of Solar+ are that it utilises the natural power of the sun and avoids loss of heat. It complies with the Bluesign standard and passes Oeko-Tex Standard 100. The technology is effective on many types of fibre blends and works especially well on light coloured textiles. It is breathable, washable, dry cleanable, and has a high level of resistance to abrasion and chafing.

Ecorepel by Schoeller, was also highlighted positively in the Greenpeace report. The Ecorepel finish biomimics the natural protection of the water-repellent plumage of ducks and waterfowl. The highly functional, odourless technology is based on long paraffin chains of very fine film that wrap around individual fibres, filaments or yarns in a spiral-like action. This reduces surface tension, so water droplets and mud simply run off the fabric. The breathability of the fabric is not affected by the technology, and the feel remains extremely soft. Ecorepel is fluorocarbon-free, and easily biodegradable. The technology complies with the Bluesign standard and passes Oeko-Tex Standard 100.

Outdoor Teflon fabric protector from DuPont is developed to specifically meet the industry’s need for excellent water-repellency for outerwear and umbrellas. The product is the latest addition to the Teflon fabric protector line. Focused on repelling rain, Outdoor Teflon fabric protector is breathable and quick drying, with the added benefit of some oil repellency. Fabrics treated with Teflon fabric protector reduce the environmental impact, because it uses DuPont Capstone repellent and release finish, which utilises short-chain molecules that cannot break down to PFOA in the environment. Testing has shown that fabrics treated with the finish require less washing, less water, lower wash and dry temperatures and less energy. Outdoor Teflon fabric protector is Oeko-Tex Standard 100 compliant and Bluesign approved.

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Staying put
Outdoor Retailer organisers have decided that the Winter and Summer Market trade shows will continue at the Salt Palace Convention Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, through to the end of 2016, backed by the support of the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA). The show was first held in Salt Lake City in 1996 and was contracted to Salt Lake through to 2014. In the last four years, the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market has seen a 13% average growth in attendance and 11% for the Winter Market show, with both matching visitor growth with an increase in net-sold square feet.

“Discussions about longer term solutions beyond 2016 are still ongoing with Salt Lake and other potential host cities,” says Kenji Haroutunian. “We understand everyone is anxious for a longer-term decision, but making sure the show has a home that fits the needs of the industry is hugely important. The extension period will help us make sure we get it right.”