

UV protective clothing: key to reducing skin damage, 2009 edition

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Abstracts

The principal role of ultraviolet (UV) protective clothing is to protect the skin against the harmful effects of the sun, notably skin cancer. This is one of the most prevalent forms of cancer but, fortunately, it is also one of the most preventable.

Public awareness about the dangers of excessive exposure to the sun has grown considerably in recent years. However, large sections of the public remain unaware that UV protective clothing exists or that UV resistance in conventional clothing can be increased. Consequently, they rely on sunscreen for UV protection.

The slow and limited adoption of UV protection in clothing by mainstream consumers may be partly due to the fact that it can not be seen or felt unlike other performance features such as moisture management and stretch.

In the early 1990s UV protective clothing was considered to be a niche market as it comprised mainly swimwear for children and babywear. Its lack of popularity among adults was due to its relatively high cost, and the perception that it was heavy, hot and uncomfortable to wear.

However, in the past decade, a number of companies have introduced UV protective fabrics and garments which do not sacrifice comfort, breathability or other desirable characteristics commonly associated with good performance apparel. Furthermore, high quality UV protective clothing today is both functional and fashionable. It is typically made from lightweight, breathable fabrics, and can provide as much protection from UV radiation as heavyweight denim.

Looking ahead, it has been projected by some authorities that consumers will come to

expect their outdoor apparel to offer UV protection in the same way as they expect it to be waterproof or insulating today. Others in the industry are less optimistic, and believe that it will take some time before garment manufacturers and consumers fully understand the benefits of UV protective clothing.

Contents

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

UV RADIATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Solar UV index

Effects of UV radiation on human health

The link between UV radiation and cancer

Effects of UV radiation on textiles

PROTECTION AGAINST UV RADIATION

The need for protection against UV radiation

Sun awareness campaigns

Methods of protecting against UV radiation

Role of clothing in UV protection

Effect of the design and fit of a garment

MEASURING THE PENETRATION OF UV RADIATION THROUGH FABRICS

Ultraviolet protection factor

UPF Certification Scheme

FABRIC PROPERTIES WHICH INFLUENCE UV TRANSMISSION

Effect of fabric composition

Effect of fabric construction

Fabric density

Optical porosity

Cover factor

Breathability

Surface finish

Effect of fabric weight

Effect of fabric stretch and shrinkage

Effect of moisture content

Effect of fabric condition

Effect and presence of dyes in the fabric
Effect of finishing treatments and additives in the fabric
Combination of fabric properties which influence UV protection
METHODS OF BOOSTING UV PROTECTION IN CLOTHING
Incorporating UV absorbers
New methods of applying UV absorbers to apparel fabrics
Incorporating optical brightening agents
Laundering

INDUSTRY STANDARDS FOR UV PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

MARKET FOR UV PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

CONCLUSIONS

LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1: Solar UV index
Table 2: Ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) ratings
Table 3: Ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) classification
Table 4: Ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) rating of 236 summer fabrics of different fibre types
Table 5: Optical porosity, cover factor and maximum theoretical ultraviolet protection factor (UPF)
Table 6: Relationship between fibre type, density, weight and ultraviolet protection factor (UPF)
Table 7: Relationship between the weight and ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) ratings of undyed cotton fabric, Modal fabric and Modal Sun fabric samples
Table 8: Ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) ratings for cotton and polyester fabrics, by colour
Table 9: Ultraviolet protection factors (UPF) for a knitted fabric before and after treatment with a cellulase enzyme
Table 10: Examples of fabric properties which provide excellent UV protection and those which provide poor UV protection
Table 11: Examples of fabrics and garments which provide good UV protection and those which provide poor UV protection
Table 12: Effect of various treatments on the UV protective properties of white cotton T-shirt fabric
Table 13: Sun protective clothing standards in Australia, New Zealand, the USA and

Europe

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