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At the start of 2006, *WSA* ran a Viewpoint "No Excuses for Human Error" which highlighted the fact that the problems on our planet were clearly manmade and required governments, companies and individuals to move quickly to save us from catastrophe. We had reached the edge of too many 'tipping points' for this to be ignored.



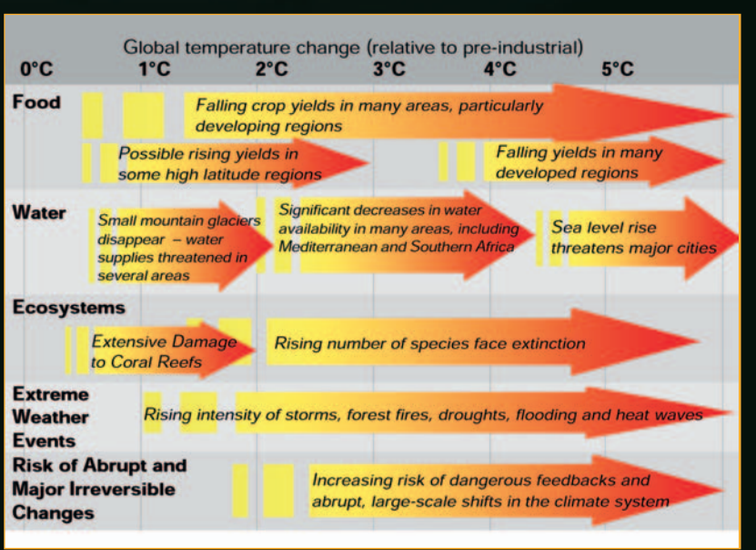
The sustainable year

Looking back on 2006, the Outdoor Industry may well view this year as its own 'tipping point' in terms of a major across the board move to bring all aspects of 'sustainability' to the fore of the Outdoor business proposition. Ten years ago the Outdoor Industry had its well respected pioneers who understood the issues and were determined to take a lead. The thing about 2006 is that it would appear that consumers, many major retailers and brands around the world have now accepted the seriousness of the issues involved and, despite government inertia, are demanding and expecting change. The areas involved run in a continuum through issues from climate change, to waste disposal, health and fitness, fair treatment of labour in the third world and sustainable textiles.

Increasingly important is the growing group of like-minded consumers who are now defined as a specific demographic under the title LOHAS. In the USA alone, Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) describes a $270 billion US marketplace for goods and services focused on health, the environment, social justice, personal development and sustainable living. The consumers attracted to this market have sometimes been collectively referred to as Cultural Creatives. Approximately 30% of the adults in the US, or between 50 and 60 million people, are currently considered LOHAS Consumers.

There is no business to be done on a dead planet

One of the most powerful initiatives of 2006 was that made by the European Outdoor Group (EOG) to establish the Association for Conservation which is the first, as they themselves put it, "to cross all boundaries". Its intention is to bring together companies across the outdoor sector and throughout Europe to raise money to give grants to grass roots conservation. Camelbak alone presented



Projected impacts of climate change.

Source: Stern review on the economics of climate change

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€25,000 as a result of the successful sale of its new award-winning bottle which it sold from its stand at Friedrichsafen. The concept is that funds will be collected from members and events and be distributed to support causes with funds up to €30,000.

The over-riding theme of this work comes from the quote from inspirational environmentalist David Brower, "There is no business to be done on a dead planet." Hervé Chabert, general manager of Patagonia Europe, is the first president of the EOG Association for Conservation told the launch meeting "Nature is our business and Nature is under attack in a lot of ways. The EOG Association for Conservation is created for Outdoor businesses to give back to Nature. We believe it starts as a stream and will become a river. We believe it will make a difference."

One element that is rising in importance for companies is the ecological footprint. Amidst a steady stream of very alarming data on the shrinking of glaciers, and problems in the mountains, the oceans, the rivers and the forests, Hervé Chabert made the very clear point that the earth's current population has an ecological footprint well above what one planet can sustain.

At the same time, for the summer market at Salt Lake City, VNU Sports Group purchased Renewable Energy Certificates from 3 Phases Energy, offsetting the show's entire electrical energy usage through the purchase of wind power-derived energy, which is delivered back to the grid. This was exceptionally well received by exhibitors and we are seeing new initiatives by REI and others to bring carbon credits and wind power offsets into their business.

Getting the materials right

It is logical therefore that the industry looks at the materials used in its garments and equipment to see that a consistent sustainable story is being told. This is an area where we have seen that it is easy to move forward on well intentioned assumptions rather than sound science. One of the best recent examples has been Patagonia's decision not to be tempted by 'vegetable leather', 'chrome free leather', or 'organic leather' for its footwear range, but rather to work with tanners who have ISO 14001 approval. Looked at holistically and dispassionately, nearly all these 'new' supposedly environmentally better leathers have been shown to deliver a bigger ecological footprint than conventional shoe leather, when it is well produced in proper plants with appropriate effluent treatment. Craig Thorne, who runs Patagonia footwear told *WSA* that as well as checks on the leather they have chosen to work in the footwear with hemp, 20% recycled EVA footbeds and hevea milk based latex.

Doug Hoschek on Green Steps

One successful development at the OR show in recent years has been the GreenSteps approach in which Doug Hoschek has played a lead role. He writes that his first thought about sustainable textiles is 'social diffusion'. Hoschek is a well known, well respected inventor and marketer of synthetic textiles from fiberfill to polarfleece. "My best allies are those working in the outdoor textile industry. Using our resources wisely, for example recycling or buying eco vehicles, and converting to wind power, moves our industry as a community into sustainable business and personal living."

He argues that most initiatives to foster sustainable behaviour rely upon large-scale information campaigns that utilise education and/or advertising to encourage behaviour change. This is of course the marketing core of outdoor textiles whose technologies have actually changed the fashion runways of highly valued designers.

Pondering the question of why we have to wrap ourselves in fossil fuel plastics to stay outdoors for longer periods of time, he thinks that we used technical tools of moisture management, waterproof breathable and thermal comfort regulation to create behaviour changes that now find people wearing these fossil fuel plastics rather than their comfortable natural fibre clothing.

Fears of sweat and hypothermia seem to drive us, even if it is no more than walking the dog or a short trip to the market or mall. Statistics tell us vacations are shorter and activity is reducing to the point of obesity. So there is a lot to be done. Yet looking at recycled polyester, organic cotton and sustainable cotton, the renewed interest in specialist wools and the development of cellulosic fibres, it does appear that the change towards renewable and sustainable materials has started. What is also interesting is Patagonia's approach to footwear – that the outcome must be a leather that makes a great performance show, or from Unifi when they discuss their Repreve that the eco-friendly approach should not damage or 'trump' the technology. As Patagonia puts it, "make the best product: cause no unnecessary harm."



Craig Throne of Patagonia Footwear. *WSA*