Industry Change is Underfoot: Turning Carpeting into Clothing

Aquafil has been a partner since day one and we’ve told you plenty about their fishing net recycling program along the way. This time, we’re turning the spotlight on a lesser-known building block of our clothing... carpeting!

We discard 3.5 BILLION pounds of carpeting every year in the U.S. — the majority gets landfilled or incinerated, and less than 5% is currently recycled. Thankfully, Aquafil continues to expand their operations and recently opened up the first carpet recycling facility (ACR #1) in the U.S. We got a firsthand look at this game-changing recycling process.

“Our partnership with Outerknown was born out of a shared vision and ambition for sustainable change.” Giulio Bonazzi, Aquafil CEO
Aquafil transforms large-scale waste — think abandoned fishing nets pulled up from the seafloor and carpeting stripped from demolished office buildings — back into raw fibers, ready to be reborn into fresh products. Their impact on our waste stream is massive: this first facility in Phoenix, AZ alone has the ability to process 36 MILLION pounds of carpeting each year. And the next facility of its kind is soon to open in Woodland, CA. Before reaching Aquafil, the carpeting is first gathered nearby at the family-run collection facility, Planet Recycling, where many of these photos were taken.
“It’s a collaborative effort made by all to do the right thing, to keep this material out of the landfill, and instead create something beautiful and sexy.” Rachel Palopoli, Planet Recycling Co-owner

Since our very first collection, we’ve sourced low-impact, regenerated ECONYL® nylon yarn to make our signature Evolution Shirt Jacket, Evolution Reversible Puffer, and Pocket Evolution Trunks to name a few. In collaboration with the legendary watchmakers at Breitling, we recently designed an ultra-durable NATO watch strap made with ECONYL® yarn. And our customers will see a familiar thread in future men’s and women’s (set to launch in spring) collections.

For us, sustainability and style run hand-in-hand. We will opt for regenerated nylon over virgin nylon any day because it’s simply what’s best for the environment. By using regenerated nylon, we help keep waste out of our ocean and landfills, we cut back on fossil fuels (virgin nylon is derived from petroleum), while halving the amount of carbon emissions compared to nylon production. The final product we use is 100% regenerated, 100% regenerable, without any quality lost in the process. Carpeting might not seem sexy, but protecting the environment is.
“Our mission is to make every decision with the highest regard for People and Planet, and our work with ECONYL® is the embodiment of this. We’ve celebrated the fishing nets that go into ECONYL® because ocean health is at our core. But carpeting is also a major input and it’s time we draw attention to what’s right under our feet.” John Moore, Outerknown Creative Director

Our goal as a brand is drive change in the industry and we’ll do it through long-term collaboration with partners, like Aquafil, and transparent sharing. With The Blue Book we’ve laid the groundwork for benefit fibers (organic, recycled, regenerated), and we hope other brands will jump on board.