

SUSTAINABILITY

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Happiness is a warm, Earth-friendly blanket

The greening of a Western classic, the Pendleton Woolen Mills blanket, offers a behind-the-scenes look at the eco-challenges facing the textile industry

BY LARRY BINGHAM | THE OREGONIAN

The idea: Pendleton would take the commemorative blanket for Oregon's sesquicentennial and ask environmental consultants McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry in Virginia to help produce an Earth-friendly blanket the nonprofit Oregon 150 committee could use as a fundraiser. The firm analyzed materials and the process. Pendleton then used alternatives deemed less harmful to humans and nature. The resulting blanket earned a silver certification (one above basic, two below platinum) on the firm's scale.

Wool: Portlander Patty Fogarty chose native trilliums and ferns, which happen to be as biodegradable, as the natural fiber at the blanket's core. Instead of organic wool, Pendleton stuck with the wool it uses for other products, primarily from South America and Australia, which has very low pesticide residue.



Photos by JAMIE FRANCIS/THE OREGONIAN

Washing, finishing: Pendleton used a soap free of chemicals that could be toxic to fish. Unlike some other Pendleton blankets, this one did not undergo a resin finish and is not machine-washable.

Water: Textile production uses a lot

Color: "The challenge with all natural fibers is what's added chemically to make the fabric perform a certain way," says scientist Howie Fendley of McDonough Braungart. Fluorine, often the ingredient that provides a bright color, doesn't biodegrade. A palette of eco-dyes provided the blanket's muted green, brown and yellow.

Binding: Because the chemical composition of a traditional felt binding wasn't analyzed, Pendleton sealed the edges with a "whip stitch" that used the same yarn found in the blanket.

Energy: To be more Earth-friendly, Pendleton needed to purchase energy offsets or generate the electricity used to make the blanket from other sources, such as solar power.

Packaging: Shrink wrap bad; re-useable, compostable cardboard good.

of water, but Pendleton earned props for the way it handles waste water. At the Washougal mill, it's filtered through a series of ponds where bacteria and microbes break down organic material until the water is clean enough to support fish and plant life in the final pond. "The goal is to even eliminate the need for this machine and use chemistry that's so healthy that the water is as clean coming out of the pipe as it was going in," says scientist Howie Fendley. "Unfortunately, it's going to be a while before any system reaches that stage."

The future: With help from McDonough Braungart, in 2002 Pendleton made a "greener" fabric that it contracts to furniture-maker Herman Miller. A blanket woven for L.L. Bean is undergoing a similar change. The next step may include Pendleton's clothing line. "It's all driven by the market," says Vice President John Bishop. "People are viewing this as value-added."



Available: All but two of the 150 limited-edition blankets, which come with Gov. Ted Kulongoski's signature on the tag, will sell for \$1,000 at www.oregon150.org or 503-445-7120. Two will be auctioned at the Oregon Ball on Saturday.

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