



Just What Is “Evolutionary Fur”?

By Teresa Platt, Executive Director, Fur Commission USA

“**E**volutionary fur”, fake fur, faux fur, is plastic by any other name. For his plastic, designer Oleg Cassini relies on Monterey, Inc. of Janesville, Wisconsin, which offers a range of “furs” such as Seal #1201, 100% Acrylic, available in such colors as white, black, camel and brown. Camel-colored seal?

Fox #379 is 40% Acrylic, 60% Modacrylic and comes in widths of 58-60 inches on 20-yard rolls, available in 032 White and 705 Dark Palimino [sic]. Sorry, no silver, red or black - might be too realistic and remind someone that once upon a time foxes were animals, not plastic polymers.

Monterey's “Natural Bear” #217 is 80% acrylic, 20% modacrylic and comes in 790 Ginger, 727 Nutmeg and 798 Chocolate. No brown, black or polar white bears.

And followers of the wild cat debates should take a sobering look at the 7/16" pile, 100% acrylic Jaguar #8684, available in #933 Cream/Butterscotch/Dk. Brown, and Tiger #8290 available in #922 Butterscotch/Black. Sorry, no tigerstripe.

What Is Acrylic / “Evolutionary Fur”?

Acrylic fiber is a synthetic fiber polymerized from acrylonitrile, a combination of acrylic resin and nitrile. Nitrile is used to make acrylic rubber for common gaskets, seals and nitrile/PVC rubber-combos for insulation. The Federal Trade Commission states, “Modacrylic fibers [are] manufactured fibers in which the fiber-forming substance is any long-chain synthetic polymer composed of less than 85 percent but at least 35 percent by weight acrylonitrile units except when the polymer qualifies as rubber.”

Who Regulates “Evolutionary Fur”?

While fur farmers are regulated by humane statutes for animal care, manufacturers of “Evolutionary Fur” are regulated by the Clean Air Act. The Act's 1990 Amendments were designed to reduce emissions of air toxics from the manufacture of polyethylene

terephthalate (pet) polymers and certain styrene-based thermoplastics.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states: “These polymers are used to produce such products as polyester fibers, soft drink bottles, automotive plastic parts, appliance parts, packing materials, and plastic toys. ... Air toxics are those pollutants that are known or suspected of causing cancer or other serious health effects. There are about 66 facilities nationwide that manufacture polyethylene terephthalate polymers and certain styrene-based thermoplastics that will be affected ...,” and the EPA added “another polymers and resins source category (nitrile resins) to the list of source categories regulated under the Clean Air Act's air toxics program.”*

Oh, and “Evolutionary Plastic” - sorry, “Fur” - or modacrylic are the first inherently flame-retardant synthetic fibers. Amazing. So chestnuts roasting near an open fire and this product are a safe combo?

Should Fur Farmers Switch Careers?

HSUS and Cassini believe the fur industry will “eventually die” as more synthetic alternatives are developed and the “profit incentive shifts away from animal fur” to the chemical industry.

The Chemical Economics Handbook offers a 66-page report on acrylic and modacrylic fibers for \$1,500. The abstract states:

“... world demand for acrylic fibers in 1995 was almost 5 billion pounds valued at over \$4 billion. Total consumption of acrylic fibers worldwide is expected to increase to almost 5.6 billion pounds in the year 2000, representing an aver-

age annual growth rate of 3.8% ... with most of the increase occurring in the People's Republic of China.

"In 1995, Asian countries accounted for 42% of world production capacity ... In 1995, over half of the world's acrylic fiber supply was produced by only thirteen companies ... The top ten companies account for 44% of total production.

"... In 1995, the Asian countries (excluding Japan) together consumed about 2 billion pounds, more than 50% more than the combined 1.4 billion pounds consumed in the United States, Western Europe and Japan."

Should fur farmers consider switching from animal husbandry to raise tiny acrylics and cute little polymers? Could there be a more fulfilling future for us in plastic production?

What Does DuPont Say?

DuPont defines "synthetic" as "Man made; not made from a natural process." And DuPont ought to know. DuPont's Carpet Reclamation webpage states: "You can recycle your Acrylic carpet [but not your 'Evolutionary Fur' coat] back into raw materials for automobile parts, soundproofing, industrial flooring, etc." DuPont "guarantee[s] that the used commercial carpets we take back will not end up in a landfill" and recycling is the "environmentally right thing to do with used carpet."

"Evolutionary Fur" has no recycling program in place. Perhaps US fur farmers could be advisors to the plastics industry since our mink and fox recycle over a billion pounds of agricultural by-products annually into a stunningly beautiful, 100% natural insulator.

DuPont also talks frankly about the "potential role of carpet in the expression of various human health effects" which fall into ...

"two general areas: 1) exposures to volatile organic compounds (VOCs) emitted from new carpet and 2) exposures to bioaerosols from older carpet. ... For older carpet, the area of concern is airborne suspension of irritants or allergenic material that either grows or accumulates in the carpet over time. ... In situations where humidity is high or water has intruded into the building, the potential for mold growth is greater regardless of flooring material. ... Obviously, it becomes necessary to routinely remove this debris from the carpet via vacuum cleaning and periodic deep cleaning."

So, those who buy an "evolutionary" fake fur should invest in a good vacuum cleaner, stay away from water, wind, snow and remain cautious near fire, and replace and recycle their plastic coat, along with their carpet, every few years. Oh, and look out for extremists releasing those tiny acrylics and cute little polymers into the wild!