



History of Kappler 1976 – 2014

Kappler Development Company was founded on **April 1, 1976** by George Kappler in Guntersville, Alabama. The company was located in a 3,000 square foot building in the commercial district. It began with eight employees and six sewing machines. At first, Kappler simply sewed disposable garments for **other** companies. In the fall of 1980, the company relocated to a larger facility in an area of Guntersville known as East Lake and had fifty employees. The decision was made to manufacture and market a line of “**Kappler**” disposable clothing. The name of the company was changed to simply Kappler. George reasoned that the company had finally developed into something.

In **1982** Kappler relocated into its own building in the Mountain Crest Industrial Park of Guntersville. After several expansions and purchases, the company now has sixteen acres and three buildings with about 240,000 square feet. Corporate offices, research and development labs, as well as manufacturing and distribution facilities, are all located in this campus setting.

Three major developments occurred in the **mid-1980s**. The company began operations in Nottingham, England to serve the European market, a Research and Development division was started, and a small company, *Andover Industries*, was purchased. This company was relocated from Lawrence, Massachusetts to Guntersville and renamed *LifeGuard, Inc.* Kappler manufactured and sold low to mid-range (solid and liquid hazards) protective clothing, while *LifeGuard* manufactured and sold high end protective clothing (liquid and vapor hazards). These actions would result in Kappler becoming a recognized international brand name for a full line of chemical protective clothing (protection against solid, liquid, and vapor hazards) as well as the most innovative company in the industry.

The Kappler R&D group filed several patents that covered technology used to provide liquid and vapor proof seams in garments, fabrics that held out a wide range of chemicals to include blood and viral hazards, and fabric formulas that allowed breathability while giving various degrees of barrier protection. These developments were given trade names such as **NSR, Responder, Reflector, CPF 1-4, and NexGen.**

Kappler began to investigate food packaging films as a source of chemical protection. **Saranex**, a Dow product, was originally used as cheese wrap. A combination of these films was used to develop **Responder**, introduced in **1987**, and it changed the entire nature of HazMat protection. Previously, fire departments had to stock a variety of suits made from fabrics that would give protection for acids, caustics, organic solvents, and other assorted liquid as well as vapor hazards. Trying to determine which suit to use for each incident was time consuming as well as

costly to maintain such a large inventory. The prices for these suits ranged from \$700 to \$4000 each. The introduction of **Responder** meant that a HazMat team could now use one suit for any hazard. Each suit was approximately \$500 and was to be discarded after contamination. Since the suit was now discarded, the cost of the suit could be billed by the fire department to the company responsible for the spill along with other consumables. Within five years of its introduction **Responder** was being used by some 80% of US HazMat teams and was being used in other countries.

In the **early 1990s** Kappler became aware of microporous films. These films would give particle and liquid protection but due to the nature of their structure they could also provide a degree of breathability. Garments made from these products would form the basis of the **ProVent** product offering for the medical market. It was envisioned that surgeons and emergency workers would appreciate a fabric that offered both blood and viral protection while at the same time being comfortable to wear. These garments were adopted by several surgery centers, the National Institute of Health, and the Center for Disease Control but competition was difficult with the likes of Kimberly Clark, Johnson & Johnson, and Cardinal Health Care.

While Kappler did not achieve spectacular success in the medical market, the technology lessons learned served to assist the development of **NexGen**. DuPont began to enter into the garment market in the mid 1990s. Kappler viewed this as a threat and pushed the development of a product that could compete with **Tyvek**. The introduction of **NexGen** gave the market a product that was better than **Tyvek**. It provided even better liquid protection, was slightly cooler to wear, and was approximately 10% less expensive. This was Kappler's second development homerun after **Responder**.

Motivated by some health problems and a desire to secure a retirement nest egg, George Kappler agreed in **October of 2001** to enter into an alliance agreement with DuPont. The basis of this agreement was that:

1. Kappler would not compete with DuPont in the Industrial/Fire market for 5 years.
2. DuPont could use the Kappler name for this period.
3. DuPont was sold the trade names of **Responder**, **Reflector**, **CPF 1-4**, and **NexGen**.
4. DuPont was licensed the use of **Responder**, **Reflector**, and **NexGen** fabrics.

From **2001 to 2006** Kappler was active in the medical and military markets. The proactive sportswear market was investigated. This involved researching various seaming techniques and woven fabrics for specialized retail applications as well as special military projects. The DuPont agreement expired in **October 2006**, at which time Kappler made the decision to re-enter the Industrial/Fire chemical protective apparel market.

In **2006** Kappler adopted a revised business model as it reentered the market. The decision was made to focus strictly on the mid-range and higher end protective garments. This allowed Kappler to focus on developing highly technical and specialized fabrics. **ProVent** was kept for the medical and pharmaceutical markets and for few specialized industrial applications. Kappler also consolidated all of its operations into the Guntersville location. All facilities in Canada, Mexico, England, France and Germany were either shut down or sold to the local managers.

In **late 2006** Kappler re-introduced **ProVent** into the industrial market as a **NexGen** replacement. The **Zytron** line of chemical protective fabrics was also introduced to compete with the **CPF** and **Responder** products. In addition, the Kappler R&D division added new personnel and began working on new fabrics for the 21st century. Areas of particular interest were a combination of thermal and chemical protection for flash fire scenarios and breathable chemical suits for long term wear. New technologies, such as “nano” and “reactive”, were also researched for possible application for “smart” garments that would decontaminate themselves, that would indicate the presence of a hazardous agent, or that would give low signature levels in the visible spectrum. After a five year recess, Kappler was once again **THE MOST INNOVATIVE PROTECTIVE APPAREL SUPPLIER**.

In **2008 Frontline 300** was introduced to oil refineries as a “line break” suit for production and maintenance applications in situations that have flammable and hazardous chemicals. It has also been a product of choice for law enforcement encountering “meth labs”. In early **2010 Frontline 500** (NFPA 1991) was introduced. The **Frontline 500** suit has become a staple among HazMat professionals. It has also been adopted by the United States Military.

Today, Kappler is a family owned business with employees owning some 25% of the company while George and his two daughters own the balance. There are no plans to take the company public. George Kappler serves as the company’s Chairman of the Board. The business is managed by his daughter, Laura Kay, who is President. Dennis Sanders, Jason Cole, Barbara Stone, and Philip Mann are in charge of Sales & Marketing, Research & Development, Accounting, and Technical Support respectively. Altogether this team has a total of over a 100 years experience in working together and in this industry.