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NBC suits and outdoor activities

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- Gear reviews and tests - Clothing -



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Description :

Lets find out how NBC suits perform in the outdoors.

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NBC suits and outdoor activities

I remember on numerous occasions when somebody stepped in to a forum and asked how well a NBC (Nuclear, Biological and Chemical) suit would perform for outdoors activity. The general response was usually that it isn't the best choice, but explanations usually stop after they told you that you get a little black from these suits. So there is only one good way for me to find out how they really perform. I bought one and tried it...

So why would people look into NBC suits as outdoor clothing? A very simple reason: economy. They simple cost very little. NBC suits made in the west are usually of the breathable type, to prevent soldiers from overheating. But they are also wind stopping and highly water-repellent. Sounds a little bit like the properties of some high-tech and expensive fabrics, doesn't it? Well NBC suits are made from a laminate of a strong windproof and water-repellent outer fabric and an inner fabric made of activated carbon, to absorb chemical vapors. They somewhat perform like modern outdoor fabrics, but not quite.

The one I bought is an old British one dating from 1984. The No.1.MK.III model in a green color. Cost where 3,75 Euros. Yes, you read it right, just 3,75! About as much as a large hamburger. All the information here is about this particular suit. I did not try other NBC suits, but i suspect that other NBC suits to perform similarly.



The suit

When I got the suit, they where packed in vacuum packages, pretty standard for NBC suits, to preserve the carbon layer. The clear plastic packaging had a little V notch on one of the corners, so it's easy to open the package in case you really are in a hurry... or plain lazy. The smock and trousers are packed separately.

Once opened the smock and trousers where easy to grab and fold out. But both the smock and trousers had a little start up problems. The carbon layers have been vacuum pressed to each other for 22 years, so you had to separate them first to create some space inside the suit. Took a few minutes, but wasn't such a problem for mine purpose. Although you could imagine a soldier cursing and jumping up and down, if he would have the same problem.

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The suit is pretty big for its size, compared to normal clothing. That's normal since these suits are meant to be worn above soldiers normal clothing in a hurry. The trousers go up pretty high and are equipped with suspenders. This means you have to wear the trousers before you can wear the smock. The suspender bands don't clip on to the trousers on the front like usual. You have to pull the bands through a loop and then tie both bands to each other, while you tighten the waist. A little piece of Velcro helps a little to keep the trouser closed. The lack of a fly is a big problem when you have to answer nature's call. Because you have to take off the smock first, to release the suspenders, so you can drop your trousers. It only has 2 pockets on the trousers, one on both thighs. These pockets only have a small piece of Velcro to keep them shut, but has no flaps. So it's possible to collect more things in your pockets than you want or loose things.



The trousers note the suspenders

The smock is like a sweater to get in to. It doesn't have a zip or buttons at the front to make the head opening larger. Making it a little harder to find the head hole, but the wideness helps a lot. The smock is pretty short, though. It's really too short for mine taste. The hood has plenty to spare space above your head, probably to accommodate head-wear. The waist and arms can be tightened by using Velcro bands. The hood has a string closure with cord lock. There is a pocket on your belly. This one has a flap.



The smock note the wideness and short length.

Both the Velcro bands on the trousers and smock really aren't great in keeping things closed. But it's simple, easy and cheaper. You shouldn't forget that they are only meant to be worn for short periods of time, because the carbon layers lose their effectiveness when it's out of the package. So it's understandable.



Velcro adjustment straps.

The fabric protects well against the wind. Light rain can be stopped, by the DWR finish. But the inside will get damp pretty quickly, during serious downpours. The carbon layer makes you a little black, but it's really not that bad. You won't notice anything on you skin or colored clothing. You can only notice it when you are wearing white things under need. I do recommend wearing something under need it, since the fabric isn't what I would call soft or even comfortable.

The size and weight of this suit is pretty large. You can get much smaller and lighter equipment to do the same. They are even larger than normal rain-wear when they are still in there vacuum package.

Conclusion:

So are NBC suits suitable for the outdoor? Well let's say that they aren't totally useless, but I would spend my money on something else, next time. Even though it cost me only 3,75, I really don't use it. But that's just mine opinion.

Pros: Very cheap, windproof and water-repellent clothing.

Con's: large, heavy, weird looks, lack of good pockets, feels weird to the skin, leaves blackness on white clothing, isn't waterproof, you can't have a quick pee, smock is too short, adjustments are all done with the less than optimal Velcro.

Any additions or corrections will be posted on the comment section below.