

How to Care for Waterproof Breathable Jackets, Bibs, and Pants

Work 'n More Gear Care Guide | Updated 2025 | worknmore.com

Waterproof breathable outerwear is engineered to do two things at once: keep rain out and let sweat vapor escape. When it stops doing both, most people assume the gear is worn out. In most cases, it isn't. It just needs to be cared for properly.

Waterproof breathable jackets, bibs, and pants rely on a system of two layers working together — a DWR-treated outer fabric and a waterproof breathable membrane underneath. Both layers degrade without the right maintenance. The good news is that regular washing and periodic re-proofing with the right products will restore performance and significantly extend the life of your gear.

This guide covers exactly how to do that, and why Grangers is the right choice for the job.

How Waterproof Breathable Gear Works

To understand why care matters, it helps to understand what's actually happening inside your jacket or bib. Waterproof breathable outerwear is a multi-layer system, and each layer has a job.

Layer	What It Does	Why Care Matters
Outer face fabric	The surface you see — treated with DWR to bead water off	DWR degrades; must be maintained
Waterproof membrane	Blocks liquid water; allows moisture vapor (sweat) to escape	Stays intact but is blocked when face fabric wets out
Inner lining	Comfort layer next to base layer	Accumulates body oils; needs regular washing

The DWR Coating

DWR stands for Durable Water Repellent. It's a chemical treatment applied to the outer face fabric of the jacket that causes water droplets to bead up and roll off rather than soak in. When DWR is working correctly, rain hits the surface and runs off in a fraction of a second.

Over time and with use, DWR breaks down. Body oils, sunscreen, insect repellent, dirt, and repeated compression — like being stuffed in a bag or under a harness — all degrade the coating. When it goes, water stops beading and starts saturating the outer fabric instead. This is called wet-out.

Wet-Out and Why It Kills Breathability

Wet-out is one of the most misunderstood problems in waterproof outerwear. When the outer fabric is saturated with water, the jacket feels heavy and cold — and stops breathing. The membrane underneath is still intact and still waterproof, but because the outer fabric is fully wet,

the pressure differential that drives moisture vapor through the membrane collapses. Sweat has nowhere to go.

The result feels like a failed jacket. It's not — the DWR just needs to be restored.

Quick test: is your DWR working?

Sprinkle a few drops of water on the outer surface of your jacket. If they bead up and roll off, the DWR is intact. If they soak into the fabric and darken it, the DWR has degraded and the jacket needs to be washed and re-proofed.

The Waterproof Membrane

The membrane is a thin film — either bonded directly to the face fabric or to a separate inner lining — that is physically waterproof while remaining permeable to water vapor. It's the core of what makes waterproof breathable gear work.

Unlike DWR, the membrane doesn't degrade in the same way. But it can be blocked. Contamination from the inside — body oils, sweat residue, and detergent buildup — can clog the membrane's pores over time, reducing breathability. This is why washing with the right product matters just as much as using a re-proofer.

Why Regular Detergent Is the Wrong Choice

Standard laundry detergents are designed for cotton and synthetic clothing fabrics. They work by lifting oils and particles from fibers and then rinsing away. To improve feel and reduce static, they also leave behind surfactant residue — the same chemistry that makes fabric softener work.

On waterproof breathable gear, that residue is damaging. It coats the outer face fabric and degrades whatever DWR remains. It clogs the membrane pores. And because technical outerwear fabrics don't rinse as cleanly as standard fabrics, the residue builds up with each wash, compounding the problem.

Fabric softener is worse still — it coats every fiber surface it contacts, which is precisely what makes DWR stop working. Even a small amount in a shared machine can contaminate a jacket.

The only safe approach for waterproof breathable gear is a detergent formulated specifically for technical outerwear.

Washing Your Gear: Grangers Performance Wash

Grangers Performance Wash is formulated specifically for waterproof and technical outerwear. It cleans effectively without stripping DWR or leaving membrane-clogging residue behind. It's safe for all waterproof breathable constructions, including heat-bonded seam tape, laminated membranes, and stretch fabrics.

It's also what the gear manufacturers themselves recommend. Washing with Performance Wash won't void warranties the way generic detergents can.

Step-by-Step Wash Instructions

1. Close all zippers, hook-and-loop fasteners, and snaps. This protects the hardware and prevents snagging inside the machine.
2. Check pockets and remove anything left inside.
3. Set the machine to a warm, gentle cycle. 30°C (86°F) is suitable for most technical outerwear — check the care label if unsure.
4. Add Grangers Performance Wash at the dosage on the bottle. Do not use fabric softener, bleach, or any other detergent.
5. Run an extra rinse cycle after the wash completes to remove all residue.
6. Tumble dry on low heat or hang dry in a well-ventilated space. Low heat in the dryer helps reactivate residual DWR on the outer fabric.

How often should you wash?

Wash whenever the outer fabric noticeably wets out, or whenever the jacket has accumulated heavy use (body odor, visible soiling, reduced breathability). For most workers in active outdoor conditions, that means every few weeks during peak season. Don't wait until the gear smells — by then, the membrane has likely been partially blocked for a while.

Restoring DWR: Grangers Performance Repel Plus

Washing with Performance Wash will sometimes be enough to restore water beading — particularly if the DWR hasn't fully degraded, since cleaning the face fabric allows residual DWR to function properly again. But when the coating itself has worn down, washing alone won't bring it back. That's when you re-proof.

Grangers Performance Repel Plus is a spray-on DWR treatment that restores water repellency to the outer face fabric. It's a PFC-free formula — no per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances — which meets the chemical standards that manufacturers including Helly Hansen and Carhartt increasingly require. It bonds to fabric fibers under heat, providing durable, wash-resistant protection.

Step-by-Step Re-Proofing Instructions

7. Wash the garment first with Grangers Performance Wash. Re-proofing over a dirty jacket traps contamination beneath the new DWR layer and reduces effectiveness.
8. Apply Grangers Performance Repel Plus to the outer fabric while the jacket is still damp from washing, or allow it to dry first — both work. Spray evenly from approximately 15 cm (6 inches) away, covering the entire outer surface.
9. Wipe off any drips or pooling with a clean cloth, especially at seams and pockets.
10. Activate the DWR by tumble drying on low heat for 20 minutes, or iron on a low setting with a pressing cloth between the iron and the fabric. Heat is what bonds the treatment to the fiber.
11. Allow the jacket to cool completely before testing. Sprinkle water on the surface — it should bead immediately and roll off cleanly.

Re-proofing frequency

You don't need to re-proof after every wash. Wash first, tumble dry, then test the beading. If water still sits on the surface rather than rolling off, apply Performance Repel Plus. Well-maintained gear typically needs re-proofing a few times per season under heavy use.

Recognizing When Your Gear Needs Care

Waterproof breathable gear rarely fails all at once. It gives signals. Catching them early means a wash and a re-proof, not a replacement.

- **Water is soaking in rather than beading off.** The DWR has degraded. Wash and re-proof.
- **The jacket feels heavy and clammy during activity.** Wet-out has blocked breathability. Wash and re-proof.
- **The inside feels cold and damp even when the outer is dry.** Membrane may be partially blocked. Wash thoroughly with Performance Wash.
- **Persistent odor even after hanging to dry.** Sweat and oil buildup in the lining. Wash with Performance Wash.
- **Water beads off but breathability still seems low.** Check for detergent residue buildup. Run an extra rinse cycle or rewash.

Why Grangers

Grangers has been producing technical fabric care products since 1937. Their formulations are developed specifically for the constructions used in waterproof breathable outerwear — not adapted from general fabric care chemistry.

Performance Wash and Performance Repel Plus are both PFC-free, which matters increasingly as international regulations tighten around fluorinated compounds. This isn't a compromise — Grangers PFC-free formulas match or exceed the performance of older fluorinated treatments in real-world use.

Grangers products are approved or recommended by major outerwear manufacturers and won't void product warranties the way off-the-shelf detergents can. And practically speaking, the system is simple: one wash product, one re-proofer, clear instructions. There's no reason to use anything else.

Waterproof Breathable Brands We Carry

Work 'n More stocks waterproof breathable jackets, bibs, and pants from brands our customers rely on in the field.

- **Helly Hansen** Helly Tech construction is the standard across maritime, offshore, and outdoor industrial environments. Purpose-built for sustained wet weather exposure.
- **Carhartt** Storm Defender and select higher-performance lines use waterproof breathable construction. Proven across construction, trades, and outdoor work where all-day comfort in rain matters.

- **Grundéns** Known for heavy-duty marine outerwear. Grundéns also produces breathable options for workers who need full waterproof protection with breathability on high-output jobs.
- **Portwest** Offers waterproof breathable options across their range, with strong value for employers outfitting crews who work in variable weather conditions.
- **Radians** Hi-vis and standard breathable rain gear for road crews, construction, and safety-critical environments where visibility and weather protection are both required.

Not sure which jacket or bib is right for your work conditions? Our staff can help you match the construction to your environment, activity level, and budget. Stop in at any of our Washington locations or browse the full selection at worknmore.com.

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