



Tech jackets do more than keep you warm

By Gene Sloan
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Aghast at the idea of heading into the backcountry without your cellphone, Gameboy or that all-important outdoor survival tool, an iPod?

Go ahead. You've got the power if you're wearing the new Solar SCOTT e-VEST, which has a removable solar panel to juice your electronics long after their batteries have died.

Designed for backcountry skiers, hikers and other outdoors types, the \$425 jacket is the latest in "wearable technology," an emerging trend.

"Electronics are getting smaller and drawing less power, and that's rippling into the world of outdoor gear," says Steve Casimiro, an editor and product reviewer at *National Geographic Adventure*. "In just the past year, there have been quantum leaps in the quality of the technology" available to clothing manufacturers.



Burton Shield iPod: Jacket sports a music control pad located on the sleeve.

Among high-tech products for the peripatetic:

► **Heated jackets.** The North Face Met 5 boasts built-in heaters, which run on a rechargeable battery. At medium power, it stays toasty for about five hours (\$600, northface.com).

► **Glow-in-the-dark jackets.** The Marmot Phenomenon EL has battery-powered, electroluminescent light panels on the arms, shoulders and hood that light up at the turn of a switch, making the wearer visible from nearly a mile away. The jacket would assist rescuers and be helpful in reading maps (\$750; marmot.com).

► **Walkie-talkie jackets.** Nike ACG's COMMJacket has a built-in speaker around the collar and a microphone for two-way, hands-free radio communication (\$500; altrec.com).

► **Music-playing jackets.** Burton's Shield iPod Jacket has an iPod control

system built into the sleeve allowing just a touch of the buttons to switch songs (\$380; burton.com). Burton also has a similar jacket for women, the Burton 2L (\$330).

Music is a big growth area for wearable technology. Also on store shelves is the Oakley Thump, sunglasses that have a built-in MP3 player. The glasses have tiny pivoting speakers attached to the sides, weigh just 2 ounces and can store up to 120 songs (\$395-\$495, depending on storage capacity; oakley.com).

Casimiro expects the arrival of more electronics-laden gear as components get smaller and more durable.

But he advises consumers to consider carefully before buying clothing with built-in gizmos.

In the backcountry, "technology can let you down. If it's a jacket that relies on batteries, what happens when the batteries die? What if the electronics break? Then you have a jacket that's 12 ounces heavier for no reason."