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[Freedom to Operate. How a rather late identified third party patent almost killed an innovation project – but ultimately resulted in a significantly improved product that has innovated the protective clothing industry.](#)

Many sports, but also many work environments require protective clothing to prevent athletes or workers from severe injuries. However, due to the rigidity of the material often used for this kind of clothing, it can be rather uncomfortable to wear. This is what made Richard Palmer and Philip Green, both material scientists at the University Hertfordshire/UK and passionate snowboarders in their free time, think about developing a new material that would be flexible but stiffen on impact.

The present case study highlights the importance of Freedom-to-Operate analyses by spotlighting Palmer's and Green's journey in developing and patenting this new material, which took a sudden and unexpected turn, when they found out that their initial invention had already been patented by someone else. But it also tells the story of how, in the end, this shock prompted them to come up with an even better invention that laid the foundation for a very successful company.

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