

Kevlar inventor, pioneer woman chemist Kwolek dies at 90 (Update)

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Stephanie Kwolek, a US chemist who invented the Kevlar fiber used in body armor and other bullet-proof gear, has died, her former employer said Friday. She was 90.

Kwolek, who worked for DuPont when she invented Kevlar, died in a hospice, media sources said, citing her friend and former co-worker Rita Vasta, who did not give a cause of death.

"We are all saddened at the passing of DuPont scientist Stephanie Kwolek, a creative and determined chemist and a true pioneer for women in science," DuPont CEO Ellen Kullman said in a statement.

"She leaves a wonderful legacy of thousands of lives saved and countless injuries prevented by products made possible by her discovery."

Kwolek invented Kevlar, an ultra-strong and extremely lightweight fiber, in the 1960s in what she called "a case of serendipity," The Washington Post reported.

She was looking for a material that could be used to reinforce car tires that was lighter weight and more fuel efficient than the metal previously in use.

The liquid crystal polymer she created became Kevlar, which is five times stronger than steel and extremely lightweight, DuPont said on its website.

Today, the fiber is used in body armor as well as sporting gear, boats—and yes, puncture-resistant tires.

Kwolek in 1996 was awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation "for her contributions to the discovery, development and liquid crystal processing of high-performance aramid fibers which provide new products worldwide to save lives and benefit humankind."

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