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EPA OKs Tech cotton for oil spill

Posted: June 5, 2010 - 3:01am



Ramkumar

By Matthew McGowan

Texas Tech researcher Seshadri Ramkumar has his fingers crossed.

Fibertect, his super-absorbent layered cotton product that recently gained national attention as a military decontamination wipe, could play a vital role in sopping up the oil blanketing miles of beaches along the Gulf Coast.

The Environmental Protection Agency approved the technology last week as a viable, eco-friendly way to trap oil from the ocean's water.

Every gram of the multi-layer cotton wipe, Ramukumar said, can absorb up to 20 grams of the sticky black crude choking the life out of the treasured wetlands. Fibertect can also catch the noxious fumes wafting from the spill - the same airborne pollutants suspected of making cleanup crews ill.

Now all Ramkumar needs is a green light from British Petroleum, the embattled energy company charged with cleaning the largest environmental disaster in American history.

Along with the EPA approval, the researcher from Tech's Institute of Environmental and Human Health has sent a product sample and proposal to the company.

"Everything is in place," Ramkumar said Friday. "Things are moving fast."

After six weeks of exasperated attempts to stem the flow from the well, BP has yet to successfully stop - or at least reduce - the thousands of gallons of oil oozing into the Gulf every day.

But Ramkumar knows the company must eventually turn its full attention to corralling

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and cleaning the contaminated water.

And he hopes his phone will be the one ringing.

So does Fibertect's manufacturer, Waco-based Hobbs Bonded Fibers.

Larry Hobbs, the company's vice president of manufacturing, said the plant has the capacity to immediately begin churning out 10 million pounds of the material, potentially enough to absorb hundreds of millions of pounds of oil.

Whatever shape or form is needed - from boom-compatible bunches to wildlife cleaning mitts to versatile wiping pads - the company is ready to spring into full-blown production, he said. The first batches of Fibertect could be headed to the coast within two days.

Even a long chain of raw material suppliers are on high alert.

"We've been in touch with suppliers, and they're all aware of the media coverage and the sense of urgency," Hobbs said. "They're on standby."

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BP oil spill

By vitamolly05 | 06/05/10 - 04:12

It is sad and sick to see how many people on Gulf of Mexico got affected, but money wont solve all their problem in during the tough times. My friend sent me an email that if you would like to claim for compensation the best place is oil spill claim center <http://bit.ly/8Xj11D> please forward this to your friends and family who may need this.

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Hoorah for TTU and Dr. Ramkumar and Fibertect!

By btxusa | 06/05/10 - 08:57

I have been watching the videos of the tragic efforts along the coastline and the sad condition of the birds, insects, animals, and they are heartbreaking. The fiber sounds workable, especially if combined with "berms" or sandbars built to keep the oil from continuing to go into the wetlands. I just hope BP is held to paying for these efforts -- they need to pay for the fiber to absorb the oil they have released.

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