

Researchers hope cotton might be oil spill answer



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As the Gulf Coast continues to experience a "crude awakening" a Texas Tech scientist burns the midnight oil to turn West Texas cotton into the fabric that saves lives.

"My lab focuses on cotton for industrial products where the margin will be higher," says Ramkumar.

Dr. Seshadri Ramkumar has developed a nonwoven cotton-carbon product called fibertect that can absorb 15 grams of oil per one gram of material.



This invention aimed at intervention features a layer of carbon sandwiched between two layers of low-microneer cotton.

While the cotton soaks up liquid the carbon traps carcinogenic vapors produced by oil which can devastate an ecosystem and potentially cause cancer in humans.

"This cotton-carbon technology is able to function two or three times higher than that of what synthetic materials are. It is reusable, even second time, third time, it picks up the oil and it is also biodegradable," says Ramkumar.

Nicknamed Dr. Ram this scientist thinks outside the boll when it comes to cotton.

He's sent his latest findings to BP in hopes of blanketing the Gulf Coast with his innovation.

"This cotton-carbon fibertect will simply float on the surface, suck up the oil instantaneously and then the vapors will be held by the carbon, then all you simply do is just roll that one, ring it or squeeze it to remove the oil and then you reuse it," says Ramkumar.

Dr. Ram's discovery creates a market for low-microneer cotton a discounted portion of the crop typically unappealing to the textile industry.

"Anything that puts cotton out there as being a better thing to use than plastics or synthetics to me has got to be good. It's a great use for some of the cottons that stay in the warehouse because they're not exactly what spinning mills want. Those kind of cottons are exactly what's needed for this product," says Haldenby.

According to Plains Cotton Growers Vice President Roger Haldenby low-microneer cotton made up 36% of the 2009 crop on the High Plains.

