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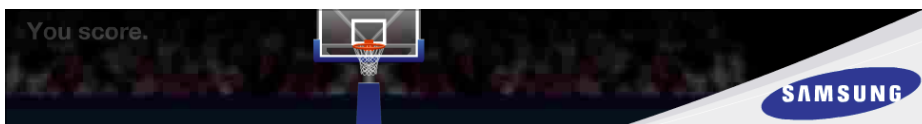
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Paper product company donates patents, funds to ESF researchers to develop stronger materials

By *Jean Stevens*

Published: Thursday, March 25, 2004

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No one wants to get caught with soggy toilet paper - and a new donation to SUNY-ESF researchers may help to solve that problem.

Kimberly-Clark Worldwide donated 13 patents to the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry last month to help researchers develop technologies to improve the strength and quality of paper products and license them for future use in the paper industry.

The company, which owns brands including Kleenex, Huggies, Scott and Kotex, has been a benefactor of ESF for decades, said Edwin White, dean of research at ESF.

"It's a mutual match - they know us, we know them," White said. "It keeps the industry viable, helps to provide jobs for our grad students, and it's really neat leveraging."

The donation will also help to bridge a greater connection between the paper technology industry and research groups at ESF, said D. Steven Keller, an associate professor within the paper science and engineering department who will lead the research team.

"Anytime we have a research project like this, it represents the support of the department by the industry," Keller said. "It opens up more interaction with Kimberly-Clark and other companies."

White and other ESF officials had been working on obtaining the patents and research funds for a year and half, White said. The university is currently working on two patents and will produce more in the future, depending on their success.

The use of paper products, contrary to popular belief, may be safer for the environment than plastic, and even safer if they are treated with biodegradable

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agents.

"People think that plastics are better because paper cuts down trees. But a result of that thought is that you're going from a renewable material to something like oil drilled from the ground that's going to run out sometime," Keller said.

The research team will focus on two main objectives: improving the chemicals used to make paper products stronger and developing treatment of low grade paper, like newsprint, to make it a higher quality, Keller said.

Within the first objective, they will work on treating paper with different chemicals, or wet agents, and processes to make it stronger when wet. They will consider chemicals that may simultaneously improve the look and strength of the paper, and work to improve the ability to recycle the products so they are more environmentally friendly.

The second objective of the research will include analysis of taking low grade paper, like old newspaper, and developing an advanced sort of recycling by changing its fiber structure to make it more useful.

The company donated enough funds to support at least two years for Keller and a small research group to conduct their work, Keller said.

"Any more money for research is definitely a good step in the right direction," said Kristen Muffler, a senior paper science and engineering major at ESF and president of the Papyrus Club.

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