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NATION, 4A

LOCAL & STATE, 1B

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Research at UF aims to speed spin cycle

■ Chemists want water to shed more easily from clothes.

By JANINE YOUNG SIKES

Sun staff writer

The makers of Tide and Cheer paid for a University of Florida study that doesn't hold water.

Well — actually 20 percent less water.

And less water is a good thing if you're developing a new laundry product that helps clothes dry faster.



Saving consumers

AT A GLANCE

■ A conservative 10 percent reduction in drying times would save consumers about \$266 million a year.

dads everywhere leave the laundry room sooner while shaving dollars off their energy bills at the same time.

"It's a rinse aid or Jet-Dry for your washing machine," said Daniel Carter, a UF doctoral student in chemical engineering, who's been doing laundry — as many as 400 loads a week at times — for the past 2½ years as part of the research.

He's been working with Dinesh Shah, a professor of chemical engineering and director of the UF Center for Surface Science and Engineering, to find just the right solution. Proctor & Gamble funded the research with a \$200,000 grant.

The chemical engineers discovered a relationship between water surface tension — that's what enables bugs to walk on water — and the amount of water absorbed in fabric.

Applied in the washing machine like a fabric softener, this chemical compound — think of it as Rain-X for clothes — helps clothes shed more water in the spin cycle. It could mean moms and

LAUNDRY: Looking for low surface tension

Continued from 1A

Lower surface tensions meant less residual water in clothes, Carter said.

A mix of common detergents and the active ingredient in fabric softeners added during the rinse cycle did the trick.

"Water doesn't want to stick to the fabric as much," Carter said.

Carter compared different

wet loads by weight to their total drying times with a dryer situated on a scale.

The product reduced the amount of water left in clothes by 20 percent. That in turn meant treated clothes dried 20 percent faster.

"We feel it's very cost-effective research and convenient for consumers," Shah said in a news release.

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reduction in drying times would save consumers about \$266 million a year.

And the detergent-fabric softener mixture is used in such low concentrations, there's no need to worry about soapy clothes, Carter said.

Shah and Carter will publish their second article about their research this month in *Langmuir*, a surface science journal.

UF has applied for a patent,

and the technology is expected to be licensed back to Proctor & Gamble. But Carter said it could be five to 10 years before shoppers may find the product on store shelves.

"This is pretty upstream," he said. "But it has great consumer appeal."

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