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## NC universities go green by using recycled caps and gowns

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WINSTON-SALEM -- Many colleges and universities across North Carolina are going green during spring commencement. A Triad company is behind the recycled fibers they're using to create thousands of graduation gowns.

Unifi is no stranger to recycled fabrics. Their product is used in the upholstery of Ford vehicles and now colleges and universities like Winston-Salem State are using a similar product for their graduation gowns.

About 240,000 graduates will walk across the stage this spring using caps and gowns made from the Repreve fabric. Unifi leaders say they've perfected the technology of taking recycled plastics and creating a polyester thread that can be used to make clothing. Officials point out that's only helping the environment. Each graduation gown is made from about 29 recycled plastic bottles.

"And those 29 bottles when you look at how many cap and gowns that are going to be sold using Repreve," said Unifi President Roger Berrier. "Just this sort of commencement time is going to use 7 million bottles. It's going to save 7 million bottles from going to the landfill."

More than a dozen North Carolina schools are using the recycled product. Officials at Winston-Salem State University say it just makes sense.

"It's really thrilling when you think about the clogged landfills, when you think about all this material that you can use, and use in a positive way," WSSU Bookstore Manager Jeanne Kiley said.

She says the students are on board with the new product and they've got plans to make these recycled gowns a yearly tradition.

"This year is our first year and we're not sure that we've gotten universal recognition for it," said Kiley. "So we're going to, during the year, do a more concerted marketing effort of it so the students will really be aware and really be proud of the contribution they're making as well."

Winston-Salem State University will also be collecting the graduation gowns they sell after the ceremony wraps up. Those gowns will be sent back to the company who re-recycle them for future graduation gowns

Twenty other North Carolina schools are using the recycled caps and gowns for their graduation ceremonies: Belmont Abbey College, Catawba College, Davidson County Community College, Haywood Community College, Johnson and Wales University, Montreat College, Orange County Community College, Pfeiffer University, Piedmont College, Salem College and Academy, Winston-Salem State University, Central Carolina Community College, Duke University, Elon University, Fayetteville Tech Community College, North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, NC State University, UNC Asheville, UNC-Chapel Hill and Wake Forest University.