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Silk maker Canepa's bet on sustainable manufacturing is paying off

It's a little known fact that textile makers are the world's second-largest polluters, after the oil industry. That's because most of the investment in the textile industry goes into design research, and so the manufacturing process has changed little in the past 100 years.

But not at Italian silk maker Canepa, a family-owned firm based in [Como](#) that makes fine textiles. Three years ago it decided to do its part to cut down on chemicals and water usage, and on Wednesday it said it has completely eliminated PVA (polyvynal alcohol) and two other chemicals from its manufacturing process.

Moreover, by using a patented process it calls SAVEtheWATER, it has cut water consumption by 30% since 2014 and energy consumption by 25%, the company said at the Milano Unica textile fair.

Standard textile production of lightweight cashmere, silk, wool and cotton calls for the addition of a synthetic fiber (generally PVA) that is later washed out at high temperature.

Canepa has developed a way to process silk using chitin, which is a protein extracted from the external skeleton of crustaceans, thereby reducing water consumption and energy bills.

It has extended this SAVEtheWATER process to its suppliers, like denim maker Italdenim.

"Our upcoming collection to be presented in 2016 will use zero PVA," said Roberto Tedeschi, general manager of Italdenim.

The demand for sustainable textiles is coming from consumers, noted Alfonso Canepa.

The Italian fashion industry is taking note. Canepa will soon announce an accord with "a major fashion house," said Maurizio Ribotti, head of marketing.

"Today we have a group of suppliers who are committed to this process," said Alfonso Canepa, who manages the company's supply chain.