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AZ Biodiesel: A local company with lofty goals

OCOTILLO TRIBUNE —

If you find yourself idle at a stoplight and notice the faint smell of French fries but there is no McDonald's in sight, your nose is probably not playing tricks on you. It's much more likely the French fry smell is coming from the vehicle next to you because it's running on biodiesel, a unique diesel fuel now available in limited amounts to Valley residents.

Biodiesel is a clean-burning alter-AZ Biodiesel, believes this fuel is the way of the future. Located in Gilbert, AZ Biodiesel is currently the only producer of biodiesel in the state, and the company is only able to meet 10 percent of its demand.

"People are driving from Peoria and Glendale to get our biodiesel," he said. "Right now most of our product is being used in passenger vehicles." Rees has sold his biodiesel to people from all over the state, including people from Chandler and Ahwatukee Foothills. It is no secret that but there is still confusion about what exactly makes biodiesel an alternative fuel to take seriously.

Biodiesel and the environment Arizona is one of the worst states in the U.S. for air pollution levels, but biodiesel may be just what the state needs to clean up its air.

"People come to us with old Mercedes cars that can't pass emissions testing," said Mike Bowles, an employee at AZ Biodiesel. "After we fill their cars with biodiesel, their cars AZ Biodiesel has set a goal to produce one million gallons of biodiesel this year.

"Getting one million gallons of biodiesel out on Arizona roads this year would be the equivalent of taking 1,000 diesel fueled trucks off the road," Rees said, adding that he's also taken it upon himself to get biodiesel in school busses.

"Diesel exhaust from school busses is horrible for our children to inhale," he said. "We have told the Mesa school system that we will match the current diesel prices it is paying to fuel its school busses." According to Rees, the school system is looking into what it will take to make the jump to biodiesel. For Rees, the switch is a no-brainer.

"Out East biodiesel in school busses is much more prevalent," he said. "Biodiesel is a straight substitute for normal diesel, and the school system would not have to change a thing to get its busses running on biodiesel." Biodiesel and your car
Setting all environmental agendas and concerns aside, biodiesel is simply better for engines than conventional diesel.

"Biodiesel is a lubricant, so when you put it in a diesel engine the clatter sound of the engine is reduced, which increases the life of the engine," Rees said. "There is also no offensive odor or cloud of black smoke like there is with normal diesel." If you notice any odor at all it would be that of food cooking, because Biodiesel is made from vegetable oil.

AZ Biodiesel is selling its product for \$2.19 per gallon, which is about 10 cents more than the going rate for conventional diesel.

"Once Arizona recognizes biodiesel as an alternative fuel, we will be able to lower our price to compete with diesel," Rees said.

Biodiesel's benefits have people flocking to AZ Biodiesel from all over the Valley.

"Everyone who uses biodiesel won't go back to diesel because their vehicles run so much smoother," Rees said.

Biodiesel and all things local AZ Biodiesel makes its fuel from used vegetable oil. The company provides a free oil pick-up service to local restaurants that would otherwise have to pay to dispose of their oil properly.

"Maricopa County alone creates 15 million gallons of waste oil each year," Rees said. "We use it to make our biodiesel because it's convenient and available locally." Larger biodiesel companies in other states have used soybean and palm tree oil to create biodiesel. According to Rees, the decision to make biodiesel out of non-waste materials is a mistake.

"The vegetable oil we use is a waste product," he said. "Using a new product to make biodiesel is more expensive, and this has caused many of the larger biodiesel companies to go out of business." Because AZ Biodiesel is still a small operation it cannot produce enough biodiesel to meet its demand. This has given Rees the ability to pick and choose who gets access to his fuel.

"This product is made locally from local resources, and we are only allowing local consumers to buy it," Rees said. "The local consumers who have sought us out are passionate about biodiesel, and they have been instrumental in helping us spread the word about biodiesel." AZ Biodiesel has plans to expand beyond its Gilbert plant by building new plants in the West Valley

and Tucson. The company will not be able to expand without additional government funding, however.

"Obama has already put \$22 billion into developing alternative fuels," Rees said. "Unfortunately, the banks won't lend us any of the money because we're a small company." AZ Biodiesel is currently producing 500 gallons of biodiesel each day, but it has recently acquired new equipment and should be able to produce 2,000 gallons each day in the near future.

Biodiesel and the future If you feel a bit confused after reading this crash course in biodiesel education, there is no need to worry, because you are not alone.

"Biodiesel is a brand new industry, and it's not something many people know about," said Richie Rees, employee of AZ Biodiesel and son of Dan Rees. "People just need to be educated about biodiesel, because once they try it they love it." AZ Biodiesel is clearly embarking on a task that has the potential to change the way Arizonans use diesel, but Dan Rees insists his company is simply taking a stand for what it believes to be right.

"We're not tree huggers, but we feel that this is the natural thing to do," he said. "This is a local resource that can clean our air, so we're all for it." To find out more about AZ Biodiesel, visit www.azbiodiesel.com or call (480) 344-1480.



AZ Biodiesel is the only producer of biodiesel in Arizona. The company is finishing construction on its first plant, which will help increase its production tremendously.

The company collects grease from local restaurants to convert into biodiesel.

Larry Ward/ Ocotillo Tribune