Biofuel for everyone

A local biofuel company wants consumers to be aware that biofuels can be used in any vehicle

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There are many who think that biofuels are the energy source of the future. If that's the case, then the University community already has a head start.

Biofuels are gasoline and diesel substitutes that are readily available in Eugene through a local organization, but people commonly believe that drivers can't use biofuels without a special vehicle. This belief is unfounded, said Alan Twigg, manager of Eugene's retail biofuel station.

Since 2002, the locally-founded company SeQuential Biofuels has manufactured the cleaner-burning, more environment-friendly fuels made from vegetable oil and plants. The company offers both bioethanol, a traditional gasoline substitute, and biodiesel an alternative to diesel.

For anyone else, SeQuential operates a retail biofuel station in south Eugene near Lane Community College that offers both varieties of fuel. Twigg said the benefits of biofuel outweigh the disadvantages, but the lack of awareness causes people to think they can't use it.

"The biggest problem that we have is that most people don't realize they can use biofuel in their regular car," Twigg said. "That's the biggest issue."
Students approached for this story were aware that biofuels were available in Eugene, but none knew that they are compatible with any car.

University student Ann Wright said her boyfriend diligently fills up at the SeQuential retail station in south Eugene. She said one main benefit to purchasing fuel through a locally-owned company like SeQuential is simply not giving money to larger existing oil companies, a belief her boyfriend shares.

"He's willing to pay five cents more per gallon rather than give money to OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries)," she said.

Alex Hacker, also a student, said she has noticed biofuel becoming "trendy" as a result of its local roots, seeing several different biofuel bumper stickers around Eugene.

Both Wright and Hacker said they would consider using biofuels upon learning that any car could run on them.

The cost of bioethanol is comparable to petroleum gasoline. The most common bioethanol product, E10, sold for $2.64 per gallon Thursday, though Twigg estimated that the price would drop this week. The statewide average cost for regular gasoline last week was only slightly less at $2.57 per gallon.

Twigg said SeQuential would like to expand the retail aspect of its operations and open more stations across the state. Though there are currently 15 cities in Oregon listed on the SeQuential Web site that offer biofuel retail, Twigg said the local emphasis is a novel concept in his business.

"It's really kind of unheard of," he said. "You don't really hear about local fuel. You have local farms, local bands, but usually not local fuel."

The University began making the switch to the energy alternative in 2002, and now purchases about 4,000 gallons of biodiesel each year, said Facilities Services Purchasing Supervisor Bill Kasper. Kasper said the move was made in an effort to further the University's emphasis on environmental concerns.

"It's more than just recycling," he said. "We're pretty proactive in a lot of environmental issues, and we always try and stay on the cutting edge if we can."

Most of what the University uses is B20, which is a mix of 20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent diesel, Kasper said. The fuel is used mainly for forklifts and construction vehicles, and the smaller Daihatsu maintenance vehicles on campus.

Of the relatively few disadvantages, Kasper said the University has spent extra money to replace rubber hoses and fuel filters more frequently because of the nature of biofuels.

"It does clean out your engine, so it throws a lot of stuff in the filter," Kasper said. He added that despite the minor setbacks, the switch to biofuels was "definitely" a worthwhile investment for the University.

University Facilities Engineer Josh Ruddick said the University stores nearly all of its diesel fuel in three
25,000 gallon underground tanks in the Millrace area across Franklin Boulevard from the main campus. Though all three of those still contain regular diesel, the University plans to integrate B20 biodiesel into at least one of them in the near future.

"We're trying to help with the beginning of it to try to make it more marketable," Ruddick said. "It's kind of nice to be on the front end of that technology, and to make that happen."

One of the tanks has already begun that transition, but it is not quick, Kasper said.

"There's a process where you really have to clean the tanks out," Kasper said. "We'll get a lot of nasty stuff going through there if we don't."

Also as part of its plan to become a more environment-friendly institution, Kasper said the University will look more into hybrid vehicles and electric power as a possibility.

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