

Recycle Cooking Oil to Help Create Local Energy and Jobs

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Written by Dale Neal, Asheville Citizen Times

ASHEVILLE — If you're among the many Americans who deep-fried a turkey for Thanksgiving, you don't have to waste the oil or any leftover grease after you're done with your dinner.

Blue Ridge Biofuels can recycle the used oil to create biodiesel that can heat homes and power diesel-engine cars. The recycling is good, too, for the Metropolitan Sewerage District, which wants to keep the pipe-clogging grease out of the sewer system.

The used vegetable oil can be recycled at bins set up around Asheville and at area landfills under a pilot program funded by the Biofuels Center of North Carolina.

“The more oil we collect, the more we can ultimately bring to Blue Ridge Biofuels to convert into clean, green biofuel to sell back to local residents,” says Melita Kyriakou, business administrator at Blue Ridge Biofuels. “This will in turn increase production and decrease cost of biofuel within the region while decreasing the amount of tax dollars spent on sewer repairs.”

Most biofuel makers rely on soybean oil to make their product, but Blue Ridge depends on the cooking oil collected from area restaurants, cafeterias, schools, camps and now homeowners. Used cooking oil is a valuable commodity that runs about \$3.50 a gallon. Most of it is shipped out of state to be used in animal feed, but Blue Ridge can use the feedstock locally, providing local energy and jobs, Kyriakou said.

Blue Ridge Biofuels is working with Green Opportunities to collect the used cooking oil from the area recycling bins.

Consumers Save

Phones are steadily ringing now at Blue Ridge Biofuels, where customers are ordering biodiesel for their home heating furnaces. Biodiesel is currently cheaper to use than straight petroleum diesel, explained Woodrow Eaton, a founder of the employee-owned company.

Both biodiesel and diesel are currently running about \$3.70 a gallon, but with its exemption from state sales tax, a tank of biodiesel can save consumers about 5 cents per gallon.

Biodiesel has been catching on with local fleet managers, Eaton said. The city of Asheville and Great Smoky Mountains National Park are using biodiesel in trucks. And more homeowners are starting to turn to biodiesel for their home heating.

Blue Ridge sells a blend of locally made biodiesel and petroleum diesel. The blend is necessary in cold weather, Eaton said, since 100 percent biodiesel can begin to gel at temperatures below freezing.

And no, Eaton said, there's no smell of french fries to their product. "If you're getting any kind of smell from your furnace, that's a problem you need to get fixed."

RECYCLE YOUR OIL

The Cooking Oil Recycling Program accepts every form of used animal and vegetable cooking oil. Some 37 locally-made recycling bins: recognizable as blue 55, black 100, and black 300 gallon drums with custom orange labels and signs — will be placed across Asheville and neighboring counties for used cooking oil. Visit the website for bin locations: www.CookingOilRecycling.org