

Biofuels Bandwagon Hits Taiwan; President Urges Upward Revisions of Biodiesel Usage Targets

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China Post via NewsEdge Corporation : Taking a lesson from high oil prices, countries around the world both developed and developing have followed a global trend of experimenting with biofuel as an alternative to depending on petroleum.

Taiwan also has jumped on the bandwagon as it has taken the initial steps within the past two years in working with biofuel, which is converted from the oil found in various plants as well as waste cooking oil.

The most widely used form of biofuel is biodiesel which can be used as fuel directly in vehicles either by itself or in a mixture with regular diesel.

Germany, the world's biggest producer of biodiesel, requires the mixture of five percent of the biofuel into the country's total regular diesel usage, effectively saving five percent of regular diesel costs.

With 95 percent of Taiwan's oil coming from abroad, Taiwan embarked on its quest to produce oil locally last year when it established its first biodiesel plant in Chiayi County.

With technological assistance provided by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the privately-run plant converts oil from soybeans, rapeseeds, and sunflower seeds into biodiesel totalling 3000 tons a year.

Out of a national energy meeting attended by all parts of the government this year, a goal was set to produce 100,000 kiloliters of biodiesel per year by 2010 and 150,000 kiloliters by 2015.

But calculate in the total possible land in Taiwan that can be devoted into growing crops for biodiesel, a total of 330,000 kiloliters of biodiesel can be potentially produced a year, said President Chen Shui-bian during a speech two weeks ago at the biodiesel plant.

"We should set our goal higher. The goal set by the meeting is not ambitious enough and

is too conservative," said Chen. "The relevant parts of the government should review their policies and not let the potential 'green gold' be wasted on importing expensive 'black gold' from abroad."

Chen's 330,000 kiloliter-per-year goal represents 5.5 percent of the nation's regular diesel usage.

This year, the Council of Agriculture plans to set aside land in Yilan County, Yunlin County, and Tainan County to grow rape seeds, soybeans, and sunflower seeds that will be screened for the production of biodiesel.

The Environmental Protection Administration has also subsidized thirteen counties and cities to supplement regular diesel used in buses and garbage trucks with biodiesel on a trial basis. Taipei County last month has begun a program mixing 20 percent of biodiesel with 80 percent regular diesel in some of its public buses and sanitation trucks.

The EPA has been promoting biodiesel because vehicles burning the fuel emit few pollutants when compared to petroleum-based fuel. According to statistics by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, biodiesel can cut down carbon monoxide emissions by 11 percent, nitrogen oxide emissions by 21 percent, and atmospheric aerosols by ten percent.

In the future, the EPA plans to expand its biodiesel trial program to other cities and counties and ultimately replicate the experience on a nation-wide basis.

One of the government's strategies of further developing biofuel is to join resources from fields such as agriculture, energy, heavy industry, and environmental protection, according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs' Bureau of Energy.

In addition to biofuel, the government is also experimenting with other alternative forms of energy such as wind power, solar energy, and thermal energy, according to the Bureau of Energy's Deputy Director General Wang Yunn-ming.

In 2004, the total output of alternative electric energy including wind, solar, thermal, and hydro-electricity reached 2,486 megawatts, or 5.54 percent of the nation's total installment capacity. The government has set a goal of increasing the output to 5,139 megawatts, or ten percent of the total installment capacity per year.