

Japan to develop bioethanol-mix fuel

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Japan plans to introduce a "greener" fuel for vehicles, possibly as early as 2008, by mixing gasoline and bioethanol.

Bioethanol, a type of alcohol made from plants, is used in the United States and Europe as a "clean" alternative automotive fuel, but until now Japan has not taken steps to introduce it.

During combustion bioethanol does emit carbon dioxide -- which is blamed for global warming -- but its use is expected to reduce overall emissions.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry plans to sell the biofuel at special gas stations as early as 2008. Ministry officials estimate that by 2010 nearly 10 percent of gasoline in Japan will be mixed with bioethanol, the Asahi Shimbun reported Tuesday.

To create bioethanol, the government at first will import sugar cane from Brazil, but later will switch to domestic materials, since Japan has the technology to produce bioethanol from wooden waste from demolished houses.

Ministry officials say the price of bioethanol will be twice that of gasoline, so the ministry will consider introducing subsidies to prevent retail prices from becoming excessively high.

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