

STATE AND LOCAL

Methanol

A&M profs find practical alternative to gasoline

By BRETT MCGLAUN
Reporter

Two Texas A&M professors, prompted to find an alternative for gasoline during the gas crunch of the mid-70s, have found a safe and practical alternative to gasoline — methyl alcohol or methanol.

Dr. William Harris, a professor in the chemical engineering department, says although the recession of the mid-70s is over, another one is just around the corner.

"This time it will be a real scarcity," he says.

Harris and Dr. Richard Davison, also of the chemical engineering department, have been working since 1974 on a system that would help a car convert its fuel system from gasoline to one that would burn both gasoline first and then methanol.

Harris says the methanol fuel also would be a cheaper alternative.

"Gallon for gallon there's not as much energy available (about half that of gasoline) but cost is half as much as gas," he says.

Harris says the equipment a car would need is similar to that of a car

using propane fuel — two fuel tanks and a conversion kit.

"You would need a car that could run on both methanol and gas," he says.

Harris says the largest part of the research has been finding a conversion kit that would work. This kit would trigger the conversion from gasoline to methanol.

"We are in the final stretch and nowhere to go. It's very frustrating." — Dr. William Harris, Texas A&M chemical engineering professor

A kit is needed because methanol requires a higher heat than gasoline to become combustible. Thus the car would have to start on gasoline and, after heating up on the gasoline, convert to methanol, Harris says.

"Methanol fuel takes about eight times as much heat," he says. "You would probably end up burning a half of a cup of gasoline before switching over."

The two professors with help from some graduate students have

developed a conversion kit that works, but Harris says it is too bulky and bothersome.

"It works much like a regulator a scuba diver would wear," he says. "It works well . . . but it's not as efficient as we'd like and it's relatively expensive and bulky," he says.

Harris and Davison were working on a computerized switching system

methanol as a combustible fuel has not been very good because of the heat factor and the corrosion of some of the engine parts by the acid in the methanol.

"There's a lot of bad news from a corrosive aspect," he says.

But he says the industry has made developments to get over those hurdles.

Harris says methanol fuel is derived from burning any carbon source, trapping and separating the chemicals that is released by that burning. In other words, when petroleum becomes scarce, methanol fuel is the only fuel that would not "run out" over time. It can be replanted with trees, corn stalks, etc.

Harris also says methanol is a clean burning fuel and does not have the cancer-causing effects of other petroleum fuels.

He says that more than 12 cars have been converted and have logged over 100,000 miles with no complications.

Gramm to keep fighting subpoena

Associated Press

DALLAS — A lawyer for U.S. Sen. Phil Gramm says an audit of Gramm's election campaign fund by the Federal Election Commission would be "like tearing up a planted field and replanting it."

James Schoener, Gramm's Washington attorney, said the senator is "ready to do everything the law requires" but will continue to fight an FEC subpoena ordering him to turn

over his fund-raising committee's financial records.

On Monday, the FEC asked a federal judge to order the Friends of Phil Gramm, the senator's fund-raising committee, to comply with the subpoena ordering the group to turn over its records.

The request, filed in Dallas federal court, is the latest in a five-month-long effort by the FEC to audit the records of the Friends of Phil

Gramm. The committee helped propel Gramm into the U.S. Senate last November.

The FEC since March said it had "reason to believe" the Dallas-based

committee failed to correctly report contributors and expenditures and failed to "continuously report outstanding debts" while accepting contributions that exceed the legal limits per contributor.

"We admit we didn't disclose the debts, but we didn't know what they were," Schoener told the Dallas Morning News.

He said Gramm recently spent almost \$100,000 on a "complete and total . . . amended campaign filing" that should satisfy the FEC.

The FEC subpoenaed Friends of Phil Gramm records on June 20, the day after the committee asked U.S. District Judge Robert Porter of Dallas to halt the FEC's audit plans.

A&M prof to head B-CS Eagle

A Texas A&M professor was named editor of the Bryan-College Station Eagle Tuesday.

Effective Sept. 1, Bob G. Rogers will replace Glenn Dromgoole, editor of the Eagle since 1981. Dromgoole is leaving to become executive editor of the Abilene Reporter-News.

A graduate of the University of Texas and of A&M, Rogers taught journalism classes at A&M from 1968 to 1970 when he left to teach at the University of Wyoming.

He rejoined the A&M faculty in 1974 and served as head of the Department of Communications from 1975 to 1982.

Rogers said that it will be tough for him to leave the students but that he is looking forward to the challenges he'll face as the Eagle's editor.

In addition to teaching, Rogers has served as The Battalion's unofficial adviser.

Rogers' experience includes serving as the managing editor of the Austin American-Statesman.

Panel to investigate allegations against Reagan administration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A congressional panel will hold a hearing next month on allegations that the Reagan administration held back money that would have gone for experimental airport radar designed to detect the perilous changes in wind direction known as wind shear, House Majority Leader Jim Wright of Fort Worth said Tuesday.

Wind shear has been considered a possible contributor to last Friday's crash of a Delta Airlines jumbo at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, in which 133 people died.

Wright, D-Fort Worth, and Rep. Martin Frost, D-Dallas, jointly an-

nounced the hearing, which is to be conducted by Rep. Norm Mineta, D-Calif., chairman of the House Public Works Subcommittee on Aviation.

"We were greatly saddened by the loss of life in the crash at DFW and appreciate Congressman Mineta's prompt action to speed the implementation of NEXRAD (Next Generation Radar) to prevent tragedies like this from occurring in the future," said a statement issued by Wright and Frost.

A spokesman at the Federal Aviation Administration had said that the Office of Management and Budget had told the agency to look at other radar systems before spending

\$55 million earmarked for NEXRAD.

One NEXRAD system is in experimental use at the airport in Memphis.

"The current efforts by the federal government to develop and implement the NEXRAD technology needs to be accelerated, and this tragedy should put to rest the efforts by the White House and OMB to slow down funding for implementation of the NEXRAD technology," said a statement issued by Mineta.

Rep. Clay Shaw, R-Fla., had asked for a hearing into the crash. Many of the victims were from Shaw's district.

Plants seized, drug raids continue

Associated Press

AUSTIN — Texas authorities seized 130 East Texas marijuana plants Tuesday but made no arrests in conjunction with continuing federal raids throughout the nation, officials said.

David Wells, spokesman for the state Department of Public Safety, said authorities raided three pot

patches east of Lufkin that yielded 71, 33 and 26 plants respectively.

"If pulled when the plant reaches maturity, each one has a potential street value of \$500," Wells said. "That could be \$65,000 street value."

Two of the raids were in San Augustine County and the third in Angelina County, he said. Authorities also raided five patches near Nacog-

doches, he said.

Wells said an investigation is continuing, but no arrests were expected immediately.

Although Texas authorities have been conducting organized searches since spring, Wells said the latest raids are part of a national crackdown designed to force up the plant's cost and prevent harvesting on federal land.

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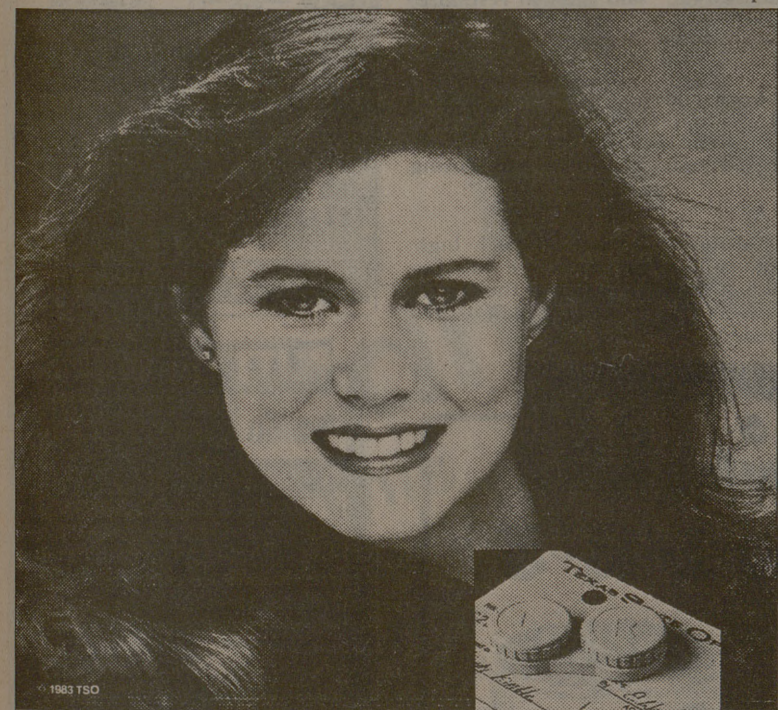
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