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## Biodiesel program going strong

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The city's cooking oil recycling program has a problem. Public response has been so good, more oil is being collected than the city has capacity to convert to biodiesel fuel.

It's a problem Mayor Bobby Irons and Gas and Water/Wastewater manager Mike Doyle like.

"We would like to expand and treat a larger volume during the warmer months," Doyle said. "These (treatment) units are expandable, and we could double our treatment capacity to 200 gallons at a time real quick by adding another one."

The city began collecting used cooking oil from residents as part of its curbside recycling program almost two years ago. Residents leave various size bottles to be collected, so it's hard to estimate exactly how much has been collected, Doyle said.

Irons, in his State of the City address last week, said the city's conversion had produced almost 2,000 gallons of biodiesel fuel that is blended with regular diesel fuel and burned in city trucks. The cost of generating biodiesel is about \$1 per gallon, compared to about \$3 a gallon for diesel at the pump, he said.

City trucks burn a blend that is 10-20 percent biodiesel. Doyle said it's possible to burn pure biodiesel in trucks, but the cost would be higher for several reasons.

"If you run anything more than B-20 (20 percent biodiesel), companies won't warranty their vehicles," he said.

Biodiesel is a powerful solvent that burns so cleanly it can clog fuel filters and weaken rubberized fuel lines.

"If you changed out everything on your trucks, you would start defeating the purpose of having this savings," Doyle said.

Because cooking oil thickens in cool weather, it becomes almost impossible to convert unless the oil is stored in a climate controlled setting. Doyle said the cost of enclosing and heating its storage area would cancel the cost savings to the city. He said converting more cooking oil during warm weather and storing it would be a more cost-

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effective approach.

Almost all the biodiesel converted by the city is from residential collections. Doyle said a few private companies collect used cooking oil from restaurants and the city does not want to compete with them. "But if restaurants want to leave it with us, that's fine."

The Recycling Department provides containers to collect cooking oil. Residents may call 256-760-6466 to obtain a container, or they may use the bottles in which the oil was originally sold, Doyle said.

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