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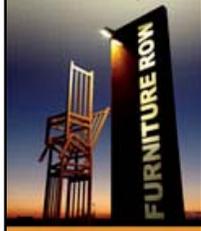


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Story

Corn cobs could be the answer to high gas prices

By [Mark Slavik](#)
Posted: Tuesday, May 23, 2006 at 3:16 PM

COLUMBIA -- Some University of Missouri researchers have cooked up a new way to make natural gas fuel tanks. Physicists at the [MU College of Engineering](#) are turning corn cobs into futuristic fuel holders. KRCG's Mark Slavik found out this discovery could allow [natural gas](#) to replace gasoline at the pumps.



It won't happen overnight, but someday soon, we could be filling up our cars with natural gas instead of gasoline. Mizzou researchers are making carbon briquettes out of ground up corn cobs. The briquettes have a microscopic network of holes that trap natural gas. These hockey puck style fuel tanks could replace bulky, metal high-pressure natural gas tanks.

Carbon pucks in a small container under your car would replace gasoline tanks. The refillable pucks would absorb natural gas at filling stations. "It's cheaper than gasoline right now. It has all of the good hallmarks of environmentally good thing. As soon as our puck is up and running and has caught on through the industry, I think everyone should be able to get such a thing," says MU physicist Peter Pfeifer.

Next month, engineers in Kansas City will test these low-pressure carbon tanks in a natural gas powered pickup truck. If it works, automakers could soon build cars with these hockey puck-looking natural gas tanks instead of gasoline tanks. Right now, eight gallons of gasoline costs more than \$20.00. The equivalent of eight gallons of gasoline in natural gas only costs about \$1.50.

Researchers pull a lever on a hydraulic press to smash together the ground up corn cobs. After a nine step process, the bits of corn cob turn into a puck about an inch thick. "It's basically a sponge for a gas. It's a sponge that can hold a lot of gas. It has a lot of nanopours into it," says MU graduate student Parag Shah.

MU researchers will send about 300 of these carbon pucks to the Midwest Research Institute in Kansas City for more testing. With gasoline prices soaring out of control, these alternative fuel tanks could take the world by surprise and it all started right here at Mizzou.

Americans produce about 85% of their natural gas. Researchers say their alternative fuel tanks would help reduce dependence on foreign oil.

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