

How Do We Use Petroleum?

Oil and natural gas together make up petroleum. This compound of carbon and hydrogen can be found in many forms. Petroleum literally means "rock oil", which refers to its solid state called asphalt. Petroleum can also be found in two types of liquid form. Crude oil is dark and sticky. It's called condensate if it's clear and volatile. Condensate evaporates very easily. In the semisolid state, petroleum is called bitumen. So what is petroleum actually made of? It looks like a simple black gooey mass, but it is actually a mixture of many chemicals, formed by decomposed remains of living things.

Different chemicals can be separated out at refineries and petrochemical plants. Then the chemicals or chemical groups can be made into a huge range of different things. Companies like [Western Pipeline Corporation](#) help find the oil, drill it and get it into production so that we can enjoy many of the products we use today. Polyurethane skateboard wheels, impact absorbing helmets and pads, even the polycarbonate case on your laptop are all produced from oil.

Petroleum in its thickest form is called bitumen. Bitumen is mainly used for paving roads. Bitumen is also popular in waterproofing roofs. It can be mixed with sand or clay and water to produce what is known as oil sands. Oil sands are similar to tar, but the materials are naturally occurring.

Bitumen is a nearly solid form of oil and is very expensive to process into gasoline or other usable fuels. Therefore, oil sands are being mined almost exclusively to extract the oil, convert it into synthetic oil, or it is being refined for other petroleum products, such as plastic.

Crude oil is a form of petroleum that is in a more liquid state than bitumen. It is mostly black or brown, but can also be yellow or green depending on its components. Crude oil from Sudan is black and North Sea oil is dark brown. Oil from Utah is amber while Texas oil is more yellow. "Sour" oils contain more sulfur and need extra processing in refineries. "Sweet" oils are much easier to refine. If someone mentions sour crude oil, they are referring to the heavier oil. Sweet grade oil usually refers to the lighter crude, found in places like Texas.

The lightest hydrocarbon molecules are so volatile that they evaporate very easily and form natural gas. Nearly every oil deposit contains at least some natural gas. Some have so much of these molecules that they are almost completely natural gas. Natural gas is a very clean burning resource that we use to cool and heat homes and businesses. It is used to generate electricity. We use it in many of the products that we utilize daily such as carpet, medicine, medical equipment, plastics and fertilizers.

About the Author

Bob Jent is the CEO of [Western Pipeline Corporation](#). [Western Pipeline Corp](#) specializes in identifying, acquiring and developing existing, producing reserves on behalf of its individual clients.

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