

## Things you didn't know about oil shale

By Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah  
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Democrats control Congress, so Americans ought to be asking about their plan to lower gas prices. Let's hope their plan doesn't rest on solar, wind and geothermal, because planes, trains and automobiles don't run on electricity; they run on oil - mostly foreign oil. Or at least 97 percent of the time they run on oil, and the other 3 percent is mostly ethanol. Let's also hope the Democrats' plan doesn't rest on ethanol to break our dependence on foreign oil, because it can't. More on that later.

Americans ship about \$700 billion annually to foreign oil traffickers, and Democrats respond by shutting down America's own energy supplies. Now at the mercy of foreign governments smart enough to produce their own energy, we are selling away our nation's place in the world and funding the rise of our most aggressive competitors and even our enemies.

Colorado, Wyoming and Utah have more oil in oil shale than OPEC. Everyone seems to know that by now, but here are six things you probably did not know about oil shale.

1) Did you know oil shale has a smaller carbon footprint than ethanol? When calculating the carbon emissions of the entire oil shale process, without the use of carbon capture technology, its total carbon footprint is about 7 percent larger than gasoline. But a peer-reviewed article in the February issue of Science calculates the entire carbon footprint of ethanol to be 93 percent larger than gasoline. The article reports that even switchgrass footprint is 50 percent larger than gasoline.

2) Did you know oil shale uses less water than ethanol and no more than gasoline? Increased ethanol production will require more irrigation. A September 2007 article in Southwest Hydrology states that irrigated corn requires more than 780 barrels of water for each barrel of ethanol. The Department of Energy reports that oil shale, for the entire process including land restoration, requires three barrels of water for every barrel of shale oil, about the same as gasoline.

3) Did you know oil shale uses much less land than either ethanol or gasoline? One acre of corn produces 10 barrels of ethanol. One acre in the oil patch produces about 10,000 barrels of oil. One acre of oil shale produces between 100,000 and one million-plus barrels of shale oil! No, that's not a typo.

Whether your concern is carbon emissions, water use or wildlife habitat, oil shale is a better answer than ethanol. And when it comes to transportation fuels, ethanol is the only alternative of any real significance.

4) Did you know oil shale has been commercially produced in Brazil for 30 years and in Estonia for 80 years? Technology is not a barrier.

5) Did you know that oil shale failed in 1982 due to the price dropping to \$10 a barrel, not because of technology or scarcity of water? That was a quarter century ago, and a lot has changed since then. Time Magazine's Man of the Year in 1982 was the Computer. Today, we have better technology, better environmental regulations and OPEC can no longer flood the oil market.

6) Did you know current law gives each governor, before any commercial leases are granted, the right to set the pace of oil shale development? But Rep. Mark Udall has put a moratorium on commercial leasing regulations, effectively taking away that right for Utah's governor. The action produces no additional rights for Colorado, but destroys Utah's right to move forward at any pace.

Some have expressed concerns that the horse should not be put in front of the cart with regard to oil shale production. But the moratorium slaughters the horse and barricades the road. You protect against a bust by supporting an activity, not artificially starving it.

I've supported Colorado's right to choose its own pace. Utah deserves the same courtesy.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is an online-only column and has not been edited.