

NEWS

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BRAZIL GETS GEORGIA TECH
HELP WITH GASOHOL PROGRAM

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ATLANTA, GA....Travelers with visions of a tropical paradise may be surprised when they visit Brazil. Many areas of South America's biggest nation are more like the Los Angeles freeway than travel agency posters of beaches and bossa nova bands.

"Brazilians have the same affliction as Americans," explains Dan O'Neil, an energy engineer at Georgia Tech who recently visited Brazil. "They're obsessed with the automobile. Anyone who ever thought of Brazil as a place to escape the rat race should try driving on the roads between Sao Paolo and Rio de Janeiro."

Statistics present the same picture: though Brazil is an economically underdeveloped nation, it burns more gasoline per automobile yearly than any other country in the world, except the United States and Canada.

For this reason, the Brazilian government has begun a crash program to develop synthetic fuels to run their cars. The country already is producing more gasohol than any other nation in the world.

Gasohol is a blend of gasoline and alcohol usually mixed in a 90 percent gasoline to 10 percent alcohol ratio. Most cars can use it as fuel without engine modification. Brazil has begun manufacturing 20 percent gasohol but the government's goal is to eventually use 100 percent alcohol to run its cars.

The Brazilians face a major obstacle. They must find additional crops to serve as raw materials in alcohol manufacturing processes. Brazil now

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relies heavily on sugar cane.

"If Brazil depends on one crop, the threat of a breakdown in their gasohol program is very real," O'Neil says. "Soil erosion and irrigation problems make it difficult to produce sufficient sugar cane crops for the government's alcohol needs."

To avoid this pitfall, Brazilian government officials hope to use the country's vast forest reserves to start making alcohol.

Georgia Tech researchers will provide technical assistance in perfecting processes to convert wood to alcohol.

According to O'Neil, experimentation in South America with this process will also help gasohol producers in the United States.

"American growers now rely on foodstuffs such as corn to produce alcohol," O'Neil says. "The day is already here when we need to look to inedible wood wastes as a substitute feedstock."

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