

What is Petroleum?

Petroleum is an oil that is found underground. Sometimes we call it **oil**. Oil can be as thick and black as tar or as thin as water. Petroleum has a lot of energy. We can turn it into different fuels—like gasoline, kerosene, and heating oil. Most plastics are made from petroleum, too.

People have burned oil for a long time. Long ago, they didn't dig for it. They gathered oil that seeped from under the ground into ponds. It floated on the water.

PETROLEUM IS A FOSSIL FUEL

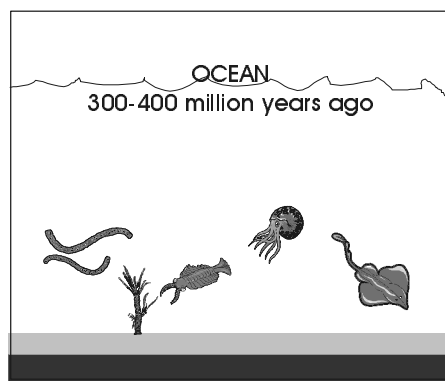
Long before the dinosaurs, oceans covered most of the earth. They were filled with tiny sea animals and plants. As the plants and animals died, they sank to the ocean floor. Sand covered them. Millions of years passed. The weight of the water and heat from the earth turned them into petroleum and natural gas.

Petroleum is called a **fossil fuel** because it was made from plants and animals. The energy in petroleum came from the energy in the plants and animals. That energy came from the sun.

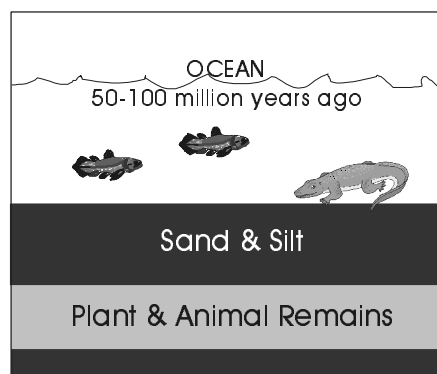
PETROLEUM IS NONRENEWABLE

The petroleum we use today was made millions of years ago. It took millions of years to form. We can't make more in a short time. That's why we call petroleum **nonrenewable**. The United States doesn't drill enough oil to meet our needs. We buy more than half the oil we use from other countries.

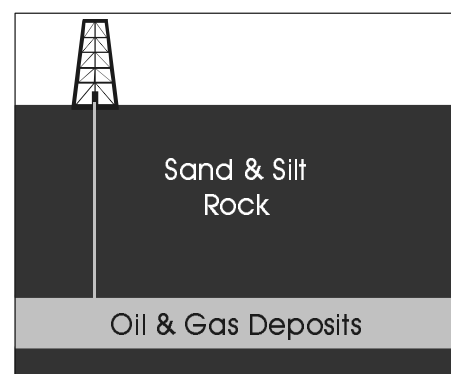
PETROLEUM & NATURAL GAS FORMATION



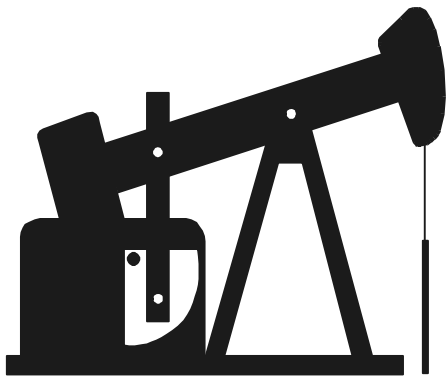
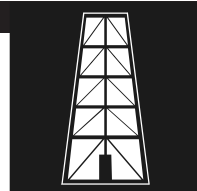
Tiny sea plants and animals died and were buried on the ocean floor. Over time, they were covered by layers of silt and sand.



Over millions of years, the remains were buried deeper and deeper. The enormous heat and pressure turned them into oil and gas.



Today, we drill down through layers of sand, silt, and rock to reach the rock formations that contain oil and gas deposits.

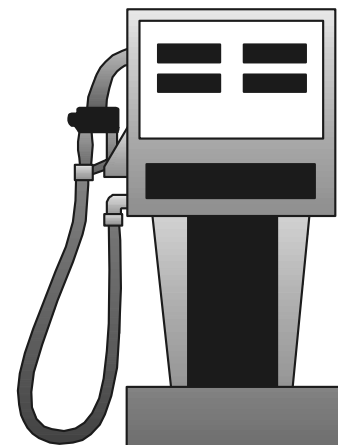


WE DRILL OIL WELLS

Petroleum is buried underground in tiny pockets in rocks. We drill **wells** into the rocks to pump out the oil. Some wells are more than two miles deep. Texas and Alaska are the states that drill the most oil.

A lot of oil is under the oceans along our shores. Oil rigs that can float are used to reach this oil. Most of these wells are in the Gulf of Mexico.

After the oil is drilled, it is sent to **refineries**. At the refineries, it is cleaned and made into different fuels. Most of the oil is made into **gasoline**. The oil is moved from one place to another by ships and trucks, and through pipelines.



WE USE PETROLEUM EVERY DAY

What would we do without petroleum? Our country would come to a stop! Our cars, trucks, and planes all use fuel made from oil.

Our factories use oil to make plastics and paints, medicines and soaps. We even burn oil to make electricity. We use more petroleum than any other energy source.

PETROLEUM CAN POLLUTE

Petroleum keeps us going, but it can damage our environment. Burning oil can pollute the air. Pollution from cars is a big problem in many parts of the country. Oil companies are making cleaner gasoline and other fuels every year.

Oil can also pollute the soil and water, and injure animals. Oil companies work hard to drill and ship oil as safely as possible. They try to clean up any oil that spills.

