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News

Dining Hall Drippings Power Garbage Truck

HUDS and FMO collaborate to turn Annenberg waste into diesel fuel

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Harvard students will now have a newfound appreciation for the grease dripping from their popcorn chicken or samosas. Since last week, used vegetable oil from Annenberg Hall has been fueling a Harvard Recycling Waste and Management truck, as a result of collaboration between concerned students and administrators.

Using vegetable oil for diesel engines is no novel concept, but this is the first time such a program has been attempted at the University.

The project was initially proposed by two undergraduates—Tatianna Bartch '06 and Jeremy P. Tchou '08—as a part of the Harvard Green Campus Initiative (HGCI)'s Resources Efficiency Program. The initiative to recycle waste oil generated by Annenberg's deep fryers gained support from Harvard University Dining Services (HUDS) and Facilities Maintenance Operations (FMO).

"It's a great environmental project. We save on fuel costs since we get the vegetable oil for free from the dining hall," said Jesse Foote, an HGCI representative.

"HUDS has plenty of grease to give away and the FMO has plenty of trucks to convert," Tchou said.

The \$5,500 cost to convert the diesel-guzzling truck into an enviro-friendly vehicle was footed by the Green Campus Loan Fund, but estimates show that the money spent will soon be recovered within a year and half's time from fuel savings.

Tchou is working with the Environmental Action Committee (EAC) to raise money to expand the program, which currently uses only half of Annenberg's waste oil. Dean of the College Benedict H. Gross '71 has already pledged \$5,000 to the program, and the EAC has received almost \$2,000 from outside donations, Tchou said.

Fueled only by waste oil, the truck shuttles large objects such as furniture, computers, and scrap metal around campus.

The real test will come when Cambridge enters its winter months. To continue running in the sub-zero temperatures, the vegetable oil will have to be preheated to 180 degrees just to remain in liquid form.

But advocates of the project are undaunted by the impending bitter cold.

"The prospects are looking good" for the winter, Foote said confidently.

"We'll just have to wait and see."

Freshmen dining in Annenberg, although oblivious to behind-the-scenes change, said they welcomed the project to use Annenberg's grease for more than its infamous deep-fried selections.

"It's a cheaper, smarter, and cleaner way to use our resources," Michael Y. Wu '10 said.

"It's not like the petroleum is going into my stomach, so it works," Lauren M. Weiss '10 said.

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