

Petroleum

Petroleum is a liquid 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 and inks 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 top of the water.

Petroleum is a Fossil Fuel

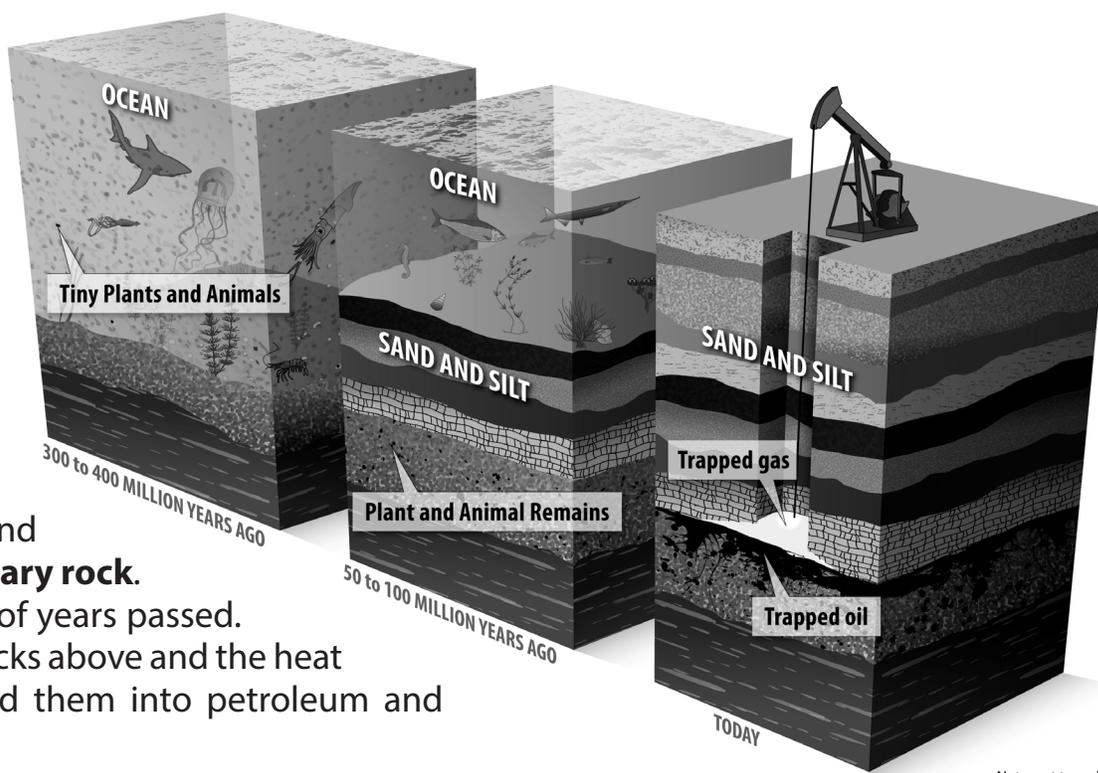
Long before the dinosaurs, oceans covered most of the Earth. They were filled with tiny sea animals and plants. As the plants and animals died, they sank to the ocean floor. Sand and sediment covered them and turned into **sedimentary rock**.

Hundreds of millions of years passed. The pressure of the rocks above and the heat from the Earth turned them into petroleum and natural gas.

Petroleum is called a **fossil fuel** because it was made from the remains of tiny sea 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 hundreds of millions of years ago. We can't make more in a short time. That's why we call petroleum **nonrenewable**. The United States doesn't produce enough oil to meet our needs. We import 51 percent of the oil we use from other countries.



We Drill Oil Wells

Petroleum is buried underground in tiny pockets in rocks. We drill oil **wells** into the rocks to pump out the oil. The typical well is about one mile deep. Texas is the state that produces the most oil.

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



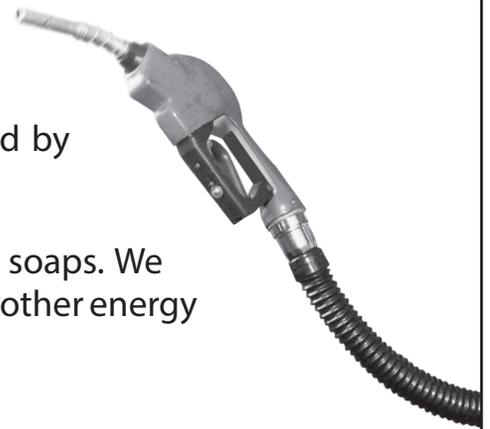
An oil rig pumps oil from a well.

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

We Use Petroleum Every Day

What would we do without petroleum? Our country would come to a stop. Most of our cars, trucks, and planes are powered by 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 fuels made from 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 diesel fuel every year.

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



Photo courtesy of gettyimages

Petroleum fuels can contribute to air pollution.