



FACT SHEET

Petroleum

What is petroleum?

The word “petroleum” comes from two words “petra” (Greek for rock) and “oleum” (Latin for oil). It was so called because oil is found in porous sedimentary rocks, trapped along with layers of gas, under layers of impervious rocks. In its widest sense, petroleum includes all the hydrocarbons found in the earth. In its narrower commercial sense, it usually just refers to the liquid deposits (crude oil).

How is it used?

Petroleum gas, or “natural gas”, is used in houses for heating and cooking and in factories as a source of heat energy. Petroleum liquid and gas are used to fuel our transport needs, large power stations, and also small electricity generators that provide local power to homes and businesses.

Challenge

In Australia, consumption of petroleum products produces carbon dioxide emissions (the principal greenhouse gas). Nevertheless, natural gas is regarded as a clean alternative to coal for generating electricity, because it produced approximately half the amount of carbon dioxide for the same energy output.

Source: CSIRO CarbonKids Curriculum Unit, Sustainable Energy for All, pages 25-32

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These educational resources are designed to introduce teachers and students to Australia's use of 'clean energy' as one of the carbon dioxide mitigation options available for achieving significant reductions in atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions. Whilst not an exhaustive educational resource, it is intended to raise the awareness of school-aged students about our changing climate, clean energy practices and applications and the other alternative energy technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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