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Out of the frying pan, into the gas tank

Eco-Cycle accepting used cooking oil

By [Ryan Morgan](#) (Contact)
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There's nothing like deep-fried turkey to bring your extended family together. Now, thanks to the folks at Eco-Cycle, your bird's greasy leavings can provide fuel to help you escape.

Starting Friday, Eco-Cycle's Center for Hard to Recycle Materials will begin accepting used cooking oil. During the six-week pilot program, businesses will be charged a dollar per gallon, but everyone else can drop off used cooking oil for free.

Eco-Cycle will take oil that would have ended up in a landfill or down the drain and give it to a company that will use it to produce biodiesel.

For most of the year, Eco-Cycle's customers don't clamor for a place to put their oil and grease. But demand does start to pick up this time of year, spokeswoman Marti Matsch said.

"Especially around the holidays, we get people calling us and asking us what they can do with their cooking oil, especially with the rise in popularity of the turkey cookers," she said.

Putting oil down the drain is bad for your pipes and bad for water treatment facilities. Throwing it in the trash is bad for the environment, Matsch said.

"When you're putting cooking oil or oils into a landfill, the liquid ends up oozing through the waste, and as it's doing that it's picking up toxic chemicals along the way," she said. "Eventually, it seeps through the landfill liner, carrying the toxins with it."

Cooking oil that decomposes in a landfill without the benefit of oxygen also gives off lots of methane, Matsch said, which is a potent greenhouse gas.

Matsch said customers may bring their used oil in a container and pour it into one of the recycling center's 50-gallon drums. Customers will need to take their containers home and clean them before they can be recycled, she said: "We can't take oily containers to recycle."

Dan Matsch, Marti's brother, will be heading the program. He said he hopes it will help Eco-Cycle find out if there's a "viable market" for dropping off cooking oil. Charging commercial kitchens a dollar per gallon should carry the program's entire cost.

"Talking to people who come through the center, we listen to what they have still in their garbage cans, and we try to find markets for it," he said.

Marti Matsch puts it this way: "Even something gross like grease is a resource we should be tapping."

Once Eco-Cycle collects the oil, a company called Rocky Mountain Sustainable Enterprises will come by to collect it. Company spokesman Adam Hall said Rocky Mountain takes the oil and makes it fit to put in diesel engines.

"It's a filtration process," he said. "We take the water, french fries and chicken bones and beer bottles and everything else out."

The fuel is then sold to Rocky Mountain Biodiesel, whose employees add methanol and lye. At the end of the day, Hall said, 70 percent of the original cooking oil is left, ready to be put in a gas tank.

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