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## [Lifestyle - Restaurants can now convert fat to 'vegawatts'](#)

Karl Burkart

Bio-diesel driving hippies have been loving the free french fry oil for fueling up their buses, but now they may find restaurant owners less likely to part with all that old grease. A new company called Owl Power has invented an inexpensive cogeneration system that converts waste oil into both electricity and hot water, saving up to 25% on utility costs.



Most restaurants operate on a pretty small margin and often utilities are a business' #1 cost. In addition, a restaurant often has to pay to have its waste oil hauled off (unless they can find a biodiesel buyer). James Peret, found and CEO of Owl Power, devised a way to kill two birds with one stone, while helping reduce the amount of fossil fuels that a restaurant typically requires.

The unit called the 'Vegawatt' is about the size of a commercial refrigerator and is installed outside the building. Waste oil is deposited, filtered and refined through a patent-pending four-step process, producing refined diesel fuel. The fuel, unlike biodiesel which is made using caustic chemicals, is then combusted in a diesel engine, creating both electricity and a hot water supply that feeds directly into the existing hot water heater. The basic 5 kilowatt unit sells for about \$22,000 and for a typical restaurant (with 3-5 fryers) will pay for itself in less than three years.

After that, it can supply an estimated 10-25% of a typical restaurant's utility bill. There are 1.2 million restaurants in the US using an estimated 3 billion gallons of vegetable oil per year. That is a whole lot of stored energy, most of it unused. The Vegawatt allows that latent energy to be harnessed, helping restaurants reduce cost while keeping CO2 out of the air.

The Vegawatt fuel is considered "carbon neutral." It produces just a little less CO2 than natural gas (about 640 grams of CO2 per kWh) but since the fuel comes from crops which absorb CO2 during their growing season, it is considered a net zero emitter by the EPA (PDF). It also burns super clean, adhering to the EPA's highest Tier 4 emission standards, which means less air pollutants like NOx and sulfur dioxide.

The very first system was just installed at a fish fry restaurant in Dedham,

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