

Vegawatt plugs in grease-fired restaurant generator

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In a sign that waste may be a favored energy source this year, a small company on Monday ~~shaded~~ has successfully plugged a vegetable oil generator into the electricity grid at a Boston-area restaurant.

The [Vegawatt system](#), developed by [Owl Power Systems](#), burns used-up vegetable oil from restaurant fryers to make electricity.



The Vegawatt generator burns vegetable oil from restaurant fryers to make electricity on-site.

(Credit: Owl Power Systems)

The company, which has been self-funded until now, expects to close a series A venture funding round later this week, according to Owl Power Systems CEO James Peret.

A 6-kilowatt machine has been online for about a month at [Finz Seafood & Grill](#) in Dedham,

Mass. It's about half the size of the normal vegetable oil dumpster, at 6 feet high, 6 feet wide, and 2 feet deep.

The Vegawatt doesn't produce nearly as much electricity as the restaurant consumes, but that's by design. Built with a relatively small diesel engine, it's sized to consume all the vegetable oil that a typical restaurant produces.

"Our philosophy is to make the maximum use of the oil available. We could go to a bigger system, but once you start talking about trucking oil to fuel this generator, the economics go out the window," Peret said on Monday. "Why burn more dinosaurs to move oil when you can install one machine outside your back door, and burn it there?"

The test at the seafood restaurant found that the Vegawatt burned all the fryer oil it produced and cut the electricity cost by about \$800 a month, or about 15 percent of its total electricity bill. The machine can also be used to make hot water.

Customers lease the product through a third-party leasing company for \$435 a month, which includes two years of maintenance. That means that the unit generates thousands of dollars a year for restaurants, said Peret.

Rather than dump oil into a waste bin, restaurant workers put it into the Vegawatt machine. Normally, a restaurant needs to pay to have the oil hauled.

Since it's burning oil, the generator creates carbon dioxide emissions and other air pollutants. But because of the smaller engine, and because it's burning vegetable oil rather than petroleum-based oil, it pollutes less than traditional diesel generators do.

Noise has not been a big concern, Peret said. "I've seen people take cell phone calls next to this machine when it was running at full power," he said.

After securing financing, the company plans to set up a manufacturing facility in Massachusetts and have about 150 units installed by next year.



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