

# Baltimore biofuel plant heats up

Startup venture seeks local customers for clean heating fuel it makes from vegetable, soybean oil

By Timothy B. Wheeler

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**Cary J. Claiborne, president and CEO of New Generation Biofuels, at the South Baltimore plant. (Baltimore Sun photo by Jed Kirschbaum / May 22, 2009)**

The thick, milky white liquid looks like Elmer's glue, though it's greasy to the touch. It has a sweet, alcohol smell. It's not your father's heating oil, to be sure. But it will do the same job, says Cary J. Claiborne, and a lot more cleanly.

Claiborne is president and chief executive officer of New Generation Biofuels, a Florida-based startup that's producing fuel from vegetable and soybean oil at a small production plant it set up this year in southern Baltimore.

"It's very biodegradable," Claiborne says as he dips his finger into a small bottle holding a sample of a recent batch. "If it didn't have certain additives, you could drink it."

Spurred on by government incentives, companies like New Generation Biofuels are popping up across the country to angle for a piece of a growing market for clean, renewable alternatives to coal, gas and oil.

New Generation, with headquarters near Orlando, has a handful of deals to supply its Baltimore-produced fuel to Maryland businesses, including a contract announced a few days ago to sell up to 1 million gallons in the next year to a gas and oil marketing company on the Eastern Shore. The firm also inked deals recently with a chemical company nearby in South Baltimore and with a greenhouse in Western Maryland.

This week, the firm's biofuel gets a tryout in an East Baltimore health clinic as part of a pilot program to investigate alternative fuels for heating city buildings.

"We're excited about testing their fuel and getting it into the neighborhoods," said Ted Atwood, energy adviser for the city's Department of Public Works. The city recently agreed to a six-month trial of New Generation's biofuel, at a cost of up to \$25,000, depending on how much fuel is burned.

The city consumes 10 million gallons of heating oil a year in its schools and municipal buildings, Atwood said, and is looking for cleaner-burning fuels that also will reduce Baltimore's carbon "footprint."

Under [Mayor Sheila Dixon](#)'s sustainability plan recently adopted by the City Council, the city is committed to improving its air quality and reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other climate-warming greenhouse gases 15 percent citywide by 2015.

Burning New Generation's biofuel should cut down on smog-forming pollution, virtually eliminating emissions of nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide, said Claiborne, an [Ellicott City](#) resident who joined the biofuel venture in 2007 after working for a Maryland pharmaceutical company and Constellation Energy.

Claiborne said the fuel is relatively simple to produce, does not require a lot of labor and has no waste to dispose of. It's produced by mixing soybean or another oil with water, alcohol and a chemical that keeps the mixture well blended.

While relying on commercial oils now for making its biofuel, the company intends to investigate other feedstocks, including used cooking oil, animal fats and even oils produced from algae. Those would require more processing, but enhance the fuel's environmental benefits, the CEO said.

New Generation is marketing itself to businesses that may be looking for ways of complying with state requirements and potential federal mandates to burn cleaner, renewable fuels.

The company hopes to sell its product to power plants, manufacturers and building owners as a heating fuel. Its first production plant, which can produce up to 5 million gallons of fuel a year, consists of a small collection of metal tanks and pipes on a small concrete pad, in an old industrial complex with companies marketing oil and ethanol. Claiborne said the current site could be expanded to produce up to 50 million gallons a year.

[http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/baltimore\\_city/baltimore.biofuel25may25.0,1024788.story](http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/baltimore_city/baltimore.biofuel25may25.0,1024788.story)