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## Himachal Pradesh govt eyeing to use pine forest residue as biofuel

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Nearly 22 per cent or 8,267 sq.km of the total forest area in Himachal Pradesh is fire-prone. A majority of the fires were reported from the pine forests since during summer the trees shed needles that are highly inflammable due to the rich content of turpentine oil.

As per government data, 1,200 to 2,500 forest fires are reported in the state every year. Mid and low hills in Shimla, Solan, Bilaspur, Una, Hamirpur, Kangra, Mandi and Sirmour are the worst-affected districts.

For conservation, scientific management and sustainable use of pine forest residue that can be used as biofuel, an alternative to alleviate dependence on fossil fuel, the government on Tuesday said it is planning to produce compressed biogas (CBG) from pine needles.

Last month it signed a memorandum of understanding with Oil India Ltd. (OIL) and is planning to start a pilot project for the bioconversion of pine needles into biofuel.

The utilisation of pine needles for biofuel production through pyrolysis and other techniques will be a sustainable way to deal with the forest fires as well as the energy crisis.

As per the pact, the government and OIL will collaborate to harness and develop new and renewable energy resources, including CBG.

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The government is eyeing to take advantage of the forest waste. Pine gasification may become a source of employment for rural people and also protect forests from fire.

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said, "OIL has assured all-out support to develop renewable energy, promote research and development, and create a sustainable and resilient energy system."

"The pact signed between two entities is a significant step towards achieving the goal of making Himachal Pradesh the first green energy state of the country by March 2026."

OIL would test the feasibility of producing CBG from the pine needle in its centre in Bengaluru.

"If the results are encouraging, this will not only pave the way for producing sustainable energy sources, replacing traditional fossil fuels, but will also boost the economy of lower areas of the state," said the government in a statement.

CBG has properties similar to CNG and can be used as Green Renewable Automotive Fuel.

"CBG has the potential to replace CNG in automotive, industrial and commercial sectors. The abundance of pine needles makes it a promising source of energy," the Chief Minister added.

The conversion of pine needles into fuel gases or electricity also adds to its economic value and acts as a motivator for the people to collect them.

"It is necessary to protect the biodiversity so that the food stock for livestock is enhanced and it is only possible when we clear our forests from the pine needles waste and utilise them for renewable energy sources," Sukhu said.



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The pine needle fall starts in April and continues till the beginning of July.

On an average, a pine forest yields two to three tonne of needles per hectare during a season and the state has pine forests spread over 1,500 sq. km, found up to an altitude of 5,500 feet.

(Vishal Gulati can be contacted at [gulatiians@gmail.com](mailto:gulatiians@gmail.com))

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