

Boeing Wants Biofuels by 2015

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EVERETT, Wash. (AP) - Boeing Co. hopes aviation biofuels will be practical for the market by around 2015, but it's going to take a lot of work.

Richard Wynne, Boeing Commercial Airplane's director of environment and aviation policy, told reporters Monday that the company is working with others throughout the industry toward having 1 percent of all aviation fuel come from non-petroleum sources by then. While that might sound like a small amount, Wynne said it's about 16 million gallons - roughly what Seattle-Tacoma International Airport uses each year.

While Boeing's customers want new aircraft to offer higher performance and more savings, planes that burn less fuel also emit less carbon into the atmosphere. Wynne said that's critical as thousands more jets join the world's fleet over the next two decades.

Boeing doesn't plan to make biofuel itself, but will be a "facilitator" for its adoption, Wynne said.

"This is an important issue for us and we're devoting a lot of time and energy to it," he said. "It's not just the Boeing Co. but we as an entire industry."

Fuel can be saved and emissions lowered through such things as more efficient engines, lighter planes with better aerodynamics, more efficient air traffic control and airlines cutting waste, Wynne said. But those efforts by themselves won't reach the industry's goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2020, he said; new fuels that result in fewer carbon emissions are necessary.

The U.S. military is experimenting with biofuels for its jets, as are some airlines. Those and other tests have been encouraging, he said, but before such fuels can see widespread commercial use there are a number of hurdles:

- The fuels have to be chemically identical and perform the same as existing fuels, and be approved for use.
- Enough sources for the fuels have to be available and at a suitable cost.
- Airports must be able to handle the fuels without having to make major changes in storage tanks, pipelines and other infrastructure.
- Commercial production must start, and enough made at a price that compares favorably with petroleum-based fuel.
- The fuels have to be sustainable, and not compete with food sources.

So-called "first-generation" biofuels, such as those made from corn or soy, don't have the chemical properties to work well in jet engines, Wynne said. But newer sources, such as algae and nonfood plants, look promising.

Many different sources and processes for the fuels will be needed, he said, not just to meet demand but so that airports around the world have a nearby source of fuel that can be had at a competitive price.

Source URL (retrieved on 01/30/2015 - 4:37am):
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