

Oil Prices Up as Fed Maintains Policy

NEW YORK (AP) — The price of oil rose Wednesday as Federal Reserve officials signaled that they'll keep interest rates at historically low levels and maintain other measures meant to stimulate economic growth.

Benchmark oil for April delivery gained 80 cents to finish at \$92.96 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Brent crude, used to price many kinds of oil imported by U.S. refineries, rose \$1.27 to end at \$108.72 a barrel on the ICE Futures exchange in London.

Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said at the end of a two-day policy meeting that the U.S. economy has shown improvement in recent months, but the Fed won't alter its aggressive stimulus policies until it is convinced the gains can be sustained.

Bernanke repeated that the Fed plans to keep its key short-term interest rate near zero until the unemployment rate is below 6.5 percent. It is currently at 7.7 percent.

Earlier the Energy Department said the nation's crude oil supplies declined last week by 1.3 million barrels, or 0.3 percent, to 382.7 million barrels, which is 10.5 percent above year-ago levels. Analysts were expecting supplies to increase.

At the gas pump the average price for a gallon rose to \$3.70. That's still down 3 cents from a month ago and 15 cents below the price at this time last year.

In other energy futures trading on the Nymex:

—Wholesale gasoline rose 7 cents to finish at \$3.12 a gallon.

—Heating oil rose 3 cents to end at \$2.89 a gallon.

—Natural gas fell 1 cents to finish at \$3.96 per 1,000 cubic feet.

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