

Trash Is The New Oil At Fla. Crystals Sugar Plant

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(CBS4) In the seemingly endless quest for alternative fuel sources, one South Florida plant has a sweet deal in place. Florida Crystals Sugar Company runs its factory on steam produced from by-products from the sugar cane cultivation process.

Plant Manager Jose Gonzalez says the main ingredient is sugar cane, but after the fiber or "bagasse" has been ground up. Workers then feed the fiber on conveyor belts and it is then burned. The heat from the incineration process warms up water sitting in separate boilers, which produce steam. Gonzalez says the steam powers generators that run the sugar mill, refinery and power plant.

Florida Crystals also burns a steady stream of wood waste, yard clippings and tree parts from all over South Florida. Lately, Florida Crystals has been using leftover debris from Hurricane Wilma as well, helping to power the largest renewable energy facility in the country. They even have leftover energy, which is then sold to power companies.

Florida Crystals spokesperson Gatson Cantens says they produce enough by burning essentially waste products to "power up about 58,000 homes". Cantens adds that by using wood waste, and sugar cane fiber, they've been helping out local landfills and protecting the environment. On top of that, Florida Crystals estimates they save about one million barrels of oil a year.

Up next for Florida Crystals—turning these same materials into Ethanol. They are currently working with researchers from FIU and UF to turn the bagasse into ethanol.

Link to video - <http://cbs4.com/local/Florida.Crystals.Sugar.2.740676.html>