

Oil Refining: Introduction

Crude oil is a mixture of hydrocarbons. It was formed millions of years ago from the remains of microscopic plants and animals. It is a non-renewable resource - once the existing deposits are used up, no more will be formed. Although we are using crude oil at the rate of over 3000 million tonnes per year, known reserves are actually going up. This is because new deposits are being discovered and new technology is making it possible to extract oil from previously uneconomic sources.



Some background

The use of crude oil that seeped naturally from the ground goes back to prehistoric times. The first oil well was drilled in 1859 by 'Colonel' Duke in Pennsylvania, USA. The well struck oil at just 69 feet (about 20 m).

Did you know?

The oil industry measures oil in barrels. One barrel is 159 cubic decimetres.

The world's known reserves of oil are over 140 thousand million tonnes.

About 40% of the world's energy is supplied by burning oil.

Noah's Ark is said to have been waterproofed using pitch - the bitumen from crude oil.