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Colorado auto shop offers eco-friendly oil option

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Photo by DOMINIQUE TAYLOR/Vail Daily
An Eagle-Vail auto shop offers re-refined oil as an eco-friendly oil-change option for car owners.

EAGLE-VAIL (AP) - Drivers who visit Nick's Quick Oil and Lube now have a greener option for motor oil. But shop owner Peggy Nicholls says it has been slow to catch on.

This last fall, Nick's started offering re-refined oil - used oil that has been refined so mechanics can reuse it. The oil is "re-refined" because it already underwent an original refining process when it turned from crude oil into motor oil.

Re-refining requires less energy than turning crude oil into motor oil.

"It takes less energy to re-refine oil because it's already been refined once," Nicholls said.

No shops contacted in the Durango area use it but a couple said they were considering it.

Meanwhile, a worker at Grease Monkey said the

shop is looking at carrying a biodegradable oil option that should be commercially available soon.

At Nick's, a re-refined oil change costs \$4 more than a regular oil change.

"It's not very much more money and it's a cool thing," Nicholls said.

While that may be true, just 50 customers have opted for the re-refined oil change so far.

"It has not taken off here at all," Nicholls said. "I think because of the economy. I think people don't know about it."

Nicholls suspects her shop is the only one in the valley offering re-refined oil. A survey of several places suggested that could be true.

Re-refined oil has potential, said Mitch Rofsky, president of the Better World Club, an eco-friendly auto club based in Portland, Ore.

"I think over the long run we would still like to get off fossil fuels," he said. "In the meantime, it certainly seems there are advantages to re-refined oil."

The environmental community has been supportive of re-refined oil but hasn't been hugely public about it, he said.

"I'm not really sure whether they're evaluating it or whether they're just reluctant to be endorsing oil," he said. "If we can use the same oil over again, that's a pretty big positive."

Matt Scherr with Eagle Valley Alliance for Sustainability said he's no expert on motor oil, but he reasoned that recycled oil is a better alternative to regular oil.

"Certainly, re-refined oil is going to be better than virgin oil," he said. "How it might stack up against, say, synthetic (oil) - I don't know."

Most companies in the Vail Valley offer synthetic oil changes.

At Nick's, Nicholls uses Sky brand oil. A refinery in Indiana picks up waste oil from places around the country and puts it through a refining process, Sky spokesman Don Siegel said.

"It reduces our dependence on foreign oil," he said.

A consultant prompted Nicholls to offer the re-refined oil change. That consultant, Tom Morley from Cleveland, Ohio, owns one of the first companies to offer a re-refined oil change.

Recycled oil is nothing new. In fact, president Bill Clinton signed an executive order in 2000, requiring federal agencies to use re-refined motor oils as long as they are "reasonable, available and meet the vehicle manufacturer's recommended performance standards."

Folks at Nick's hope more customers will embrace the re-refined oil changes.

"It would be really great if we could get 50 percent to switch to this," Nick's manager Steve Sellars said. "It would be cleaner for the valley. It reduces air pollutants."

Herald Staff Writer Katie Burford contributed to this story.

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