



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 3, 2012

Navy's Green Initiative: Costly and Not So Green

The Obama administration intends to spend another \$62 million for the Navy to “go green” with biofuels, but GOP lawmakers contend the cost is simply too high.

The White House announced on Monday that it would be launching two new biofuel research and development programs that would permit the Navy, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Energy to offer \$30 million in matching funds to support “drop-in” biofuel research and development.



“Drop-in” biofuels are those which can be used in current infrastructure, making their implementation easier and more cost-efficient. Funding for the drop-in fuels is found in the Defense Production Act, which seeks to increase national security by utilizing domestic energy.

The Department of Energy will be contributing an additional \$32 million to another initiative for “early stage, pre-commercial investments” in biofuel technology.

The Hill [provides](#) some background:

In May, Senate Armed Services Committee members derided the \$26-per-gallon biofuel and petroleum cocktail fueling the Navy’s “Great Green Fleet,” an aircraft carrier strike group testing green-energy fuels, during a markup of the 2013 Defense Authorization Bill.

But with the Great Green Fleet setting sail last week for a six-week naval exercise in the Pacific Rim, the administration is rebuffing lawmakers and using the opportunity to continue its push for the military to use cleaner fuels.

This month, the Navy will be hosting its first multi-nation exercise using biofuel in an operational setting. Entitled the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), the exercise will include 22 nations, along with 42 ships, six submarines, and over 200 aircraft. Dubbed the “Great Green Fleet,” the group will be using a 50-50 blend of alternative and conventional fuel.

Naval officials confirm that the cost of the fuel will be \$26 a gallon, as compared to \$3.60 a gallon for conventional fuel. The official did note, however, that the cost is higher because it is for a one-day supply, and that the figure would go down once the Pentagon purchases more. He added:

Investments in biofuel will produce a competitively priced — and domestically produced — alternative to conventional fuel. Such investments help the Navy and the nation become less dependent on foreign oil and thus less subject to volatility in oil prices that directly affect our readiness.

But Republicans are [angry](#), asserting that studies reveal that biofuel will always be more expensive.

Regardless of cost, the Department of Energy is defending the use of biofuels, insisting that they could reduce the use of diesel in military technology. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus said Monday:

[The Defense Production Act] is a critical component of strengthening our national security, and



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energy is a national security issue. Our reliance on foreign oil is a significant military vulnerability and it would be irresponsible not to address it.

Republican lawmakers are unconvinced, however, as “green fuel” will cost almost seven times more than conventional fuel.

Last month, Senators James Inhofe (R-Okla.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) were given bipartisan approval to add amendments to the Defense Authorization Bill that would restrict the use of biofuels.

The Hill explains:

Inhofe’s measure relieved the DOD from buying biofuels if they cost more than traditional sources. Petroleum cost about \$3.60 per gallon Monday. McCain’s provision barred the department from building biofuel refineries unless authorized by law. Both passed with a 13-12 vote in the Armed Services Committee.

McCain noted:

There are many areas of research that are wholly appropriate to the Department of Defense mission, such as efforts to extend the life and reduce the weight of batteries, adapt solar technologies to battlefield conditions, and reduce fuel consumption through more efficient engines and weapon systems. But defense funds should not be used to invigorate a commercial industry that cannot provide an affordable product without heavy government subsidies.

This is not a core defense need and should be left to the Department of Energy, which received over \$4 billion last year for energy research and development and related programs, or to the private sector to take the lead. In a tough budget climate for the Defense Department, we need every dollar to protect our troops on the battlefield with energy technologies that reduce fuel demand and save lives. Spending \$26 per gallon of biofuel is not consistent with that goal.

Meanwhile, despite the Navy’s efforts to go green, Environment News Service [contends](#) that the use of biofuel will actually pollute the ocean:

U.S. groups oppose plans to use the biofueled vessels to sink three obsolete U.S. warships off Hawaii during the RIMPAC war games later this month. They say toxics aboard the target ships will contaminate the sea and the old vessels should be recycled instead.

In fact, environmental groups have already petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency and gone to court in an attempt to put RIMPAC on hold because of the sinking exercise (SINKEX) scheduled during the RIMPAC. This year’s SINKEX would be the first since the moratorium was placed on the exercise last year by the Chief of Naval Operations, as well as the first since the Sierra Club and Basel Action Network filed a formal complaint against the EPA.

According to ENS:

The groups warn that SINKEX operations violate U.S. ocean dumping regulations, including the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act; and the Toxic Substances Control Act; as well as several international treaties such as the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter 1972, known as the London Convention; the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal; and a variety of OECD agreements.



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The groups point out that in addition to the environmental concerns, sinking the ships deprives the U.S. ship-recycling industry of resources. The cost of sinking the ships is estimated at \$27.6 million, not counting the loss of hundreds of American ship-recycling jobs.

“The hypocrisy of the Navy’s new ecological ‘Great Green Fleet’ demonstrating its “greenness” by sinking ships containing globally banned pollutants off the coast of Hawaii is particularly ironic,” observed Colby Self of BAN’s Green Ship Recycling Campaign. “But the realization that this choice by the Navy to dump poisons into the marine environment is not only unnecessary, but also is costing Americans hundreds of green recycling jobs, makes this SINKEX program both an environmental and an economic insult.”



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