Oil Shale Encyclopedia Article

Oil Shale

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Oil Shale

The term oil shale is technically incorrect in that the rock to which it refers, marlstone, is neither oil nor shale. Instead, it is a material that contains an organic substance known as *kerogene*. When heated to a temperature of 900°F (480°C) or more, kerogene decomposes, forming a petroleum-like liquid and a combustible gas. Huge amounts of high-grade oil shale exist in the western United States. By some estimates, these reserves could meet the nation's fuel needs for about a century. Although the technology for tapping these reserves already exists, it is still too expensive to compete with conventional **fossil fuels** or other sources of energy now in use.

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