

Brazil airline company to test sugar-based aviation fuel

Rio de Janeiro, Nov 19 (EFE) Brazil's Azul Airlines will conduct a demo flight by 2012 to test a sugar-based aviation fuel manufactured by a US firm, the company has announced.

The flight will mark the culmination of a project to evaluate the technical and sustainability aspects of the renewable jet fuel produced by the US company Amyris Biotechnologies Inc.

The decision on the test flight was announced Wednesday in a joint press conference by the representatives of Azul, Amyris, Brazilian aircraft maker Embraer and General Electric that will make the engine for the plane.

The fuel has been developed by Amyris, a multinational firm that currently is conducting tests at a pilot plant in the southeastern Brazilian city of Campinas.

The first manned test flight will be carried out with a mixture that includes conventional petroleum-derived jet fuel and a still-undefined percentage of a sugarcane derivative.

The goal of the project is 'to accelerate the introduction of a renewable jet fuel that could significantly lower greenhouse-gas emissions and provide a long-term sustainable alternative to petroleum-derived jet fuel', the companies said in a joint statement.

'This is a big and innovative step taken by the air transport industry in the fight against global warming,' Azul president David Neeleman said at the conference.

Embraer's environmental director, Guilherme Freire, said air transport is responsible for almost two percent of greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide and that figure is expected to rise to three percent by 2050.

The new fuel was already tested by the US Air Force Research Laboratory, the Southwest Research Institute, GE Aviation and other industry participants, but has not yet been tested on a commercial aircraft.

GE's director of commercial development, Claudio Loureiro, said even though other airlines have already conducted tests with vegetable-based fuels, Azul would be the first to perform a demo flight with one derived from sugarcane.

He added that Continental Airlines currently is developing a project in partnership with Boeing to test another vegetable-based fuel, although the particular raw material to be used has not been announced.

The general director of Amyris' Brazilian subsidiary, Roel Collier, said research carried out to date has shown that the use of sugarcane as a raw material for aviation fuel is both economically and environmentally viable and sustainable.

He added that engines running on alternative fuels can perform just as well as those powered by conventional, petroleum-derived jet fuel.

Even though the certification process is lengthy, Amyris is confident it can begin producing its patented renewable jet fuel on an industrial scale beginning 2013.

Amyris hopes to use Brazil as a platform for the production and export of sugarcane-derived fuel and therefore plans to complete the purchase of ethanol-processing plants in the coming days, Collier said.

In addition to being the world's largest producer and exporter of sugarcane and sugarcane-derived ethanol, Brazil also has the world's largest fleet of flex-fuel cars, which run on any combination of gasoline and ethanol.

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