

Eaton, GE Compete on \$500 Home Natural-Gas Fueling Stations
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By Thomas Black

July 20 (Bloomberg) -- Eaton Corp. and General Electric Co. are working on competing projects to develop a \$500 home natural-gas fueling station, enticing car owners to switch to a fuel that has become cheap because of shale drilling.

Their efforts are part of a U.S. Energy Department push to reduce the cost of such stations, which can sell for more than \$5,000, and the time it takes to refuel as a way to attract more people to drive natural-gas-powered vehicles.

Falling prices have spurred interest in natural gas to power cars and light trucks. Prices have dropped to as low as \$1.90 per million British thermal units on April 19 from \$13.69 per million Btu on July 2, 2008, as producers have developed technology to recover the gas from shale rock. Natural gas yesterday closed at \$3 per million Btu.

An affordable natural-gas station for homes could "revolutionize" how Americans commute, Dane Boysen, director of an Energy Department program to encourage use of the fuel in vehicles, said in a statement today from Cleveland-based Eaton. "My hope is that these advanced technologies will enable us to use our abundant domestic supply of natural gas for transportation, diversifying our nation's fuel and refueling portfolio for the future," he said in the statement.

Compressed natural gas sells at retail for the equivalent of about \$2.09 a gallon, according to Chesapeake Energy Corp. The U.S. average retail price for regular gasoline was \$3.45 a gallon as of yesterday, according to AAA.

Eaton said its technology will tap into a home's existing natural-gas system. The company is developing the home station with the University of Minnesota, funded in part by a \$3.4 million Energy Department grant. The company said it will draw on its experience installing electric-vehicle charging stations across the U.S.

GE Effort

GE said in a July 18 statement that it's working with Chart Industries Inc. and the University of Missouri to develop a fueling station. The Fairfield, Connecticut-based company received a \$1.8 million Energy Department grant, according to Todd Alhart, a GE spokesman.

The department is also funding projects including storage tanks being developed by Ford Motor Co. and United Technologies Corp. in separate efforts.

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