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## Lithium for Second Battery Will Dry Up in 16 Years

2009/01/06 By Bae, Il-han & Ahn, Seok-hyun

As hybrid electric vehicles use the lithium ion batteries, the prices of batteries for mobile phones and notebook computers will skyrocket in years.

This is a growing concern among experts over the introduction of lithium ion battery for HEVs.

The auto industry will begin to use the lithium ion battery for HEVs. Lithium ion battery has been known as ideal fuel for HEVs as it is light and highly efficient.

But, the problem is the reserves of lithium. The whole reserves of lithium is not enough even to meet the demand for electronic devices like mobile phones and notebook computers.

Experts predict that the reserves of lithium will be depleted in years if HEVs become more available in the future.

Therefore, there are growing voices over the development of a portfolio of other battery resources for eco-friendly vehicles in the future.

Will it be depleted in 16 years?

The lithium ion batteries are lighter and smaller than nickel metal hydride batteries.

Therefore, the demand for lithium batteries as a second battery has increased.

But, the reserves of lithium will be depleted in 2025 at the current speed of mining.

The lithium reserves are 4.1 million tons. But, annually, 250,000 tons are produced.

The lithium ion batteries are used in mobile phones and notebook computers.

But, if the demand for HEVs is growing, a different story will take place.

If HEVs use the lithium-ion batteries, an average car will consume 200 times as many as mobile phone and 40 times as many as a notebook computers.

If HEVs are introduced with the demand for lithium ion battery, the depletion of lithium will come much faster than expected.

An industry insider said, "Currently, only NiMH batteries are used for HEVs due to the safety concern. But, the lithium batteries will soon be used.

Then, the reserves will be depleted in 7 to 8 years."

Higher prices will lead to the development of reserves

But, some say that the depletion of lithium will not become as fast as others expect.

Currently, the reserves of lithium are known as 4.1 million tons at the current prices.

However, if the prices are going up, the reserves evaluated as economic will also increase to 11 million tons.

Indeed, as more and more electronic devices use the lithium ion batteries, the prices are increasing rapidly.

The prices of Li2CO have gone up to \$6,550 per ton, breaking its record high since the end of 2007. An industry insider said, "The economic reserves are determined by the price.

If the current trend of prices continues, more reserves will be found out, leading to the extension of depletion time."

### Development of Alternative Technology

Even more reserves of lithium are found out, many experts say that it is urgent to develop alternative technology. Chile accounts for 70% of the world's lithium reserves.

If those countries with the lithium reserves including Chile try to control the output, the demand and supply will be disrupted.

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Therefore, some insist that new technology to utilize nickel metal hydride batteries available for HEVs as well as metal/air batteries should be developed.

Ku Hui-jin, manager of the Korea Battery R&D Association, said, "There is technology to extract lithium from sea water although its economic feasibility is not yet proven.

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Various measures should be developed to be prepared for the demand and supply disruption."



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