

Science Focus

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BODY DYSMORPHIA

A brief history of
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EYE OPENER

We have ignition

HOKKAIDO, JAPAN

The rocket engine being test fired here has been built to be kinder to the environment. Unlike other engines, which commonly use some sort of rocket fuel (refined kerosene, for example), this one burns biomethane derived from cow manure.

The engine is called the Zero and is being developed by Interstellar Technologies, a Japanese rocket company, to launch small satellites without adding extra carbon dioxide (CO₂) to the atmosphere.

That's not to say biomethane is an emission-free fuel. CO₂ is still released when biomethane is ignited. But unlike fossil fuels, combustion of biomethane is CO₂ neutral (it doesn't add to the natural production of CO₂) and also means a reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

"As more and more rockets launch, it becomes more important that we minimise the impact that they have on the environment if we're to continue with space travel," says Dr Russell Hall, the lead for sustainable manufacturing at WMG, University of Warwick. "More sustainable space travel is possible, though it may take time and needs to be fully thought through."

INTERSTELLAR TECHNOLOGIES

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