Another reason that oil formed underneath Southwest Asia has to do with the movement of Earth's crust. You read in Chapter 17 that Earth's crust is broken into giant sections called **tectonic plates**. These plates have continued to drift very slowly over the surface of Earth. When two tectonic plates collide, they may create pockets where oil can form. This is what happened in Southwest Asia very long ago. The Iranian Plate and the Arabian Plate bumped up against each other, creating spaces where oil and gas were formed and trapped.

It takes extensive effort to get oil out of underground pores and pockets. Oil companies must drill through the cap rock to get at the oil underneath. Then they pump the oil up to the surface. However, sometimes this pumping process is not successful. When that happens, petroleum engineers inject water or gases into the well, creating added pressure to force the oil out of the rocks.

The oil that reaches Earth's surface doesn't look much like the gasoline or oil that people purchase at their local gas station. Crude oil is usually combined with water and natural gas when it comes out of the ground. Oil companies have to refine this crude oil to make it into gasoline and other useful products. Some other petroleum products are asphalt, plastics, and the wax used to make candles.

Oil Is Not Distributed Equally Since very specific conditions were necessary for the production of oil, it is not surprising that these conditions existed in some places but not in others. Southwest Asia was one of the regions where an enormous amount of oil formed long ago.

Within Southwest Asia, however, the **distribution** of oil is uneven. Saudi Arabia is the largest country in this region, and it also has the most oil. In fact, approximately one quarter of the world's proven oil reserves lie under its desert sand.

Kuwait, in contrast, is a tiny country. Saudi Arabia could contain 125 Kuwaits and still have space left over, but little Kuwait holds almost a tenth of the world's known oil reserves. Other countries in Southwest Asia, such as Syria and Yemen, have less oil, but they still have more oil than most other countries in the world.

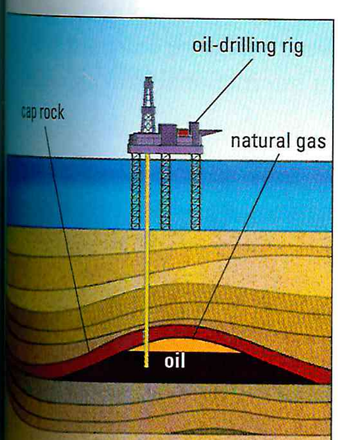
Oil Reserves in Southwest Asia, 2007

Country	Proven Oil Reserves (in millions of barrels)
Saudi Arabia	264,200
Iran	138,400
Iraq	115,000
Kuwait	101,500
United Arab Emirates	97,800
Qatar	27,400
Oman	5,600
Yemen	2,800
Syria	2,500
Bahrain	125

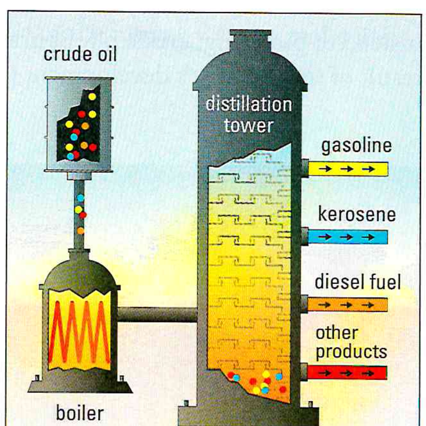
Source: Central Intelligence Agency.

Who Has the Oil?

The table lists the proven oil reserves of 10 Southwest Asian countries. Proven reserves are deposits that oil companies know they can pump to the surface at a reasonable cost.



Today, oil companies drill through the cap rock and pump crude oil to the surface.



Oil refineries heat the crude oil to produce fuels, oils, and chemicals.

Products made from oil include gasoline, plastics, and materials used throughout our homes.