

Unfortunately, there is no standardized definition of what constitutes a "light", "medium" or "heavy" oil on the API scale. The World Energy Conference uses the following classification (WEC, 1986, p. 160).

heavy oil	density: 1,000 to 920 kg/m ³	API gravity 10°-22.3°
medium oil	density: 920 to 870 kg/m ³	API gravity 22.3°-31.1°
light oil	density: less than 870 kg/m ³	API gravity more than 31.1°

An oil with an API gravity of less than 10° (that is, with a density of more than 1,000 kilograms/cubic metre) is commonly referred to as **bitumen**.

The Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) does not usually differentiate between light and medium oils. It defines heavy oil as having a density greater than 900 kg/m³ (an API gravity less than 25.7°) and light-medium oil as having a density less than 900 kg/m³ (an API gravity more than 25.7°) (ERCB, 1987, p. 1-2). Many American oilmen consider a heavy oil to be one with an API gravity below 20°, a medium oil to have an API gravity between 20° and 25°, and a light oil to be one above 25°.

In this report, the boundary between light-medium and heavy oils will be understood to be 20° with respect to U.S. data and about 26° in the case of Canadian data, unless otherwise indicated.

Many other terms used in the oil industry also lack a standardized meaning or usage. To avoid ambiguity in this report, the following definitions of commonly used terms will apply.

Hydrocarbons: any organic compounds – solid, liquid or gaseous – consisting only of the elements carbon and hydrogen. Crude oil, natural gas and coal are essentially mixtures of hydrocarbons of varying degrees of complexity and containing varying amounts of impurities such as sulphur, nitrogen, oxygen, helium and metallic elements.

Fossil fuels: combustible geologic deposits of biogenic hydrocarbons. These deposits include crude oil, natural gas, oil shales, oil sands and coal.

Kerogen: fossilized, insoluble organic material found in sedimentary rocks, usually shales, which can be converted by distillation into petroleum products. Kerogen is considered to be a precursor of petroleum.

Petroleum: a Latin derivative literally meaning "rock oil" and often defined as naturally occurring liquid hydrocarbons. Sometimes the definition is extended to include refined products in the liquid state. In common industry usage, petroleum has come to mean any hydrocarbon mixture that can be produced through a drill pipe, including natural gas, condensate and crude oil. This report follows the common usage of the term.