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YAKIMA, Wash. Jan 25, 2005 — Researchers at a national science laboratory in south-central Washington have found a way to achieve in days what takes Mother Nature millions of years converting wood to mineral.

The ability to make petrified wood could hold promise for separating industrial chemicals, filtering pollutants and soaking up contamination, said Yongsoon Shin, research scientist at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

"Wood petrified is very hard and very porous material it's not really a wood component," Shin said Monday in a telephone interview. As a mineral product, petrified wood has a large, hard surface and a porous inside, making it ideal to soak up or separate substances or act as a catalyst in other processes, he said.

Natural petrified wood occurs when trees are buried without oxygen, then leach their wood components and soak up the soil's minerals. For instance, at the Ginkgo Petrified Forest, a state park on the west shore of the Columbia River in central Washington, trees were believed to have been buried without oxygen beneath molten lava millions of years ago.