

Communities Can Take Immediate Steps to Conserve Energy

While an energy plan is needed, steps can be taken right now.

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T. Boone Pickens - Credit Pendergrast

With the global population at seven billion people what does that mean for our energy resources globally and our corner of the world locally?

For energy guru T. Boone Pickens, the keynote speaker at the World Energy Engineering Congress (WEEC) in Chicago last month, “Natural gas is the new coal, it’s abundant.”

Sure, natural gas has its advantages: low-cost, safe storage, low smog-producing pollutants with no ash and high heating value. Conversely, however, it is non-renewable, highly flammable, odorless (which makes hazardous detection difficult and often deadly when carbon monoxide is added for detection purpose) and it leaves cavities in the earth.

Americans consume 20 million barrels of oil every day, with 6 million barrels imported daily from OPEC. Pickens states that self-reliance is also good politics in that “Our world would be very different if we stopped relying on OPEC crude oil.”

One relatively quick solution, Pickens suggests, is to target the 8 million over-the road trucks and convert them to using natural gas. “Then we could stop needing OPEC,” he said. That is easy for Pickens to suggest — the trucking companies may have issues with conversion costs unless there are incentives to do so.

Our country undoubtedly needs an energy plan to guide us to find clean energy, reduce carbon emissions, end reliance on OPEC and garner low environmental impact. With bi-partisan bickering and oil and environmental lobbyists butting heads in Washington, that is not likely to happen any time soon.

That said, communities can take immediate steps on their own to better the environment and fortify our energy reserves. Speak up and encourage your local community administrators to address renewable energy and conservation relating to local infrastructure and transportation issues.

Businesses, too, have many options and opportunities to adopt energy-saving procedures. Many exhibitors at the WEEC displayed versatile, high-efficiency, low-cost energy products. Corporations can take advantage of energy-reduction products that monitor room occupancy and automatically power down machines. Solar cell products were abundant commodities, as were new technology for insulation, appliances and occupancy-detection systems that evaluate body temperature and motion for thermostat-control management.

Individuals and businesses can practically accomplish energy efficiency — with or without some of these new-fangled products. Turn off lights, replace outdated lighting with energy-efficient bulbs, repair leaks and defects in piping and insulation, use programmable thermostats, buy Energy Star rated products and recycle.

According to Peter Affrunti, a design management consultant in Crystal Lake, “We have right at hand environmentally-friendly products and initiatives. It’s easy to take the first step. Even though there is often times an initial cost to conservation, you can look at the potential and know that you’ll reap cost savings in the end. The earth, too, will reap benefits for future generations.

"For every design project, whether it's new construction or remodeling, we evaluate the environment and determine how to satisfy requirements of the client, reduce the carbon footprint and stay in budget," Affrunti said.

Two facilities in Crystal Lake that are Gold LEED certified are Waste Management's Virginia Road transfer facility and [Curran Group](#) headquarters. Created by the U.S. Green Building Council, the LEED program certifies buildings that meet sustainable site standards. These business owners took a leadership role in reducing their companies' carbon footprints.

Not many companies will or can be LEED certified, but every company can take steps towards sustainable efforts.

Energy independence and changing how we use our resources will strengthen our economy as well as our local communities.

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