

# Less Energy

by Don Fitz

What's the best way you can think of to save energy? Now, think of a couple of more ways and write all three down and then come back to this article.

Are the ideas that you thought of things that individuals do, like turning your thermostat down or riding a bicycle instead of driving? Or, were they social policy ideas, like taxing unnecessary transportation of food or requiring public buildings to be constructed at or below ground level?

If you are like most people I've talked with, at least 2 of your 3 ideas were individual choices and not social policy. There is such massive propaganda throughout the corporate media that individual choices are the way to conserve energy that it is extremely difficult to break out of this way of thinking.

But break out we must if we are going to significantly lower energy consumption. It's no accident that corporate media hypes the individual choice type of thinking. It lets the corporations off the hook. By blaming individuals for over-consumption, it ignores the social factors that push us in those directions.

Many of us would love to take mass transportation; but if you want to spend less than an hour getting to work, that's not a viable choice. We drive cars because of conscious corporate decisions to destroy public transportation in St. Louis. While it's great to ride bicycles, what we really need (in addition to vastly more bicycle lanes) is an expanded bus system feeding into a train system. St. Louis is headed in the opposite direction — having fewer bus lines.

On March 19, 2006, the Instead of War Coalition sponsored an assembly in Forest Park called, "Stop the War; Feed the People." The Gateway Green Alliance was one of many groups with a table and literature. The Greens also had an interactive display on "Less Energy." It had a box with nothing in it. This was to dramatize the fact that less energy often means doing nothing that requires energy instead using "energy to build a gadget that saves energy."

The box wasn't totally empty. There was a sheet of paper that encouraged people to "do fewer things that need energy." It also asked "What can a society do? Write down your idea for how our society can use **less energy** and tack it to the outside of this box."

The comments that 22 people wrote down are below. Several of them are great ideas for changing social policy to use less energy. But many are individual choices rather than societal changes. Propaganda is so powerful that energy reduction must be based on individual acts that, even when asked "What can a society do?" people still tend to answer in terms of personal choices.

"Less energy" is very different from "gadgetized energy." American society has such an extreme preoccupation with gadgets that people often want to come up with a new gadget when gadgets themselves are the source of the problem. Such is the case with cars and oil.

Cars are gadgets and they are a problem. They are a problem not only because of oil used to run cars but because of the massive energy used to construct them,

the land that is cemented over to drive them and the rancid materialism that stems from worshipping them.

Since oil is one way to get energy, it can be thought of as a gadget and it is also a problem. It is a problem because it poisons living creatures when it is burned; because it heats up the world and intensifies hurricanes that destroy coastal cities like New Orleans; and because people and corporations can get rich off of it and put politicians in office who kill people for it.

Sadly, there is a popular belief that these problems can be solved by having different car gadgets and different energy gadgets. All of the various car gadgets still require energy to construct them, the destruction of natural space to drive them and elevation of the materialism that pervades US life. Substituting a new energy gadget for oil will still involve people getting rich off of manufacturing it and wars to plunder land to grow it.

A real solution will require fundamental social changes so that we don't have to constantly be going everywhere and using roads and gadgets to get there. It will mean improving the quality of life while decreasing the quantity of objects consumed by the average American. It will mean fewer hours of work and more time enjoying life. The energy crisis will never be solved if we ignore the truism: "Live simply that others may simply live."

## What can society do to save energy? (from March 19 assembly)

1. Pull subsidies for oil and other unrenowable energies.
2. Abort corporate rights. End privatization of nature. Educate the masses. We have the means. You must choose.
3. Hydrogen fuel celled cars and more funding for research.
4. Hook up a hose to Bush's mouth and heat the country with the hot air.
5. Less unneeded luxury. More fitness related means of travel.
6. To convert energy is simple. Convert to wind and solar energy.
7. We can start with solar energy. Also, corn and soybean can be substituted for oil.
8. Build smaller houses and run them on solar power.
9. Biodiesel.
10. To reduce energy consumption, use a bicycle for trips < 5 miles. If you have to drive, use a diesel vehicle fueled by plant-based biodiesel or use veggie oil.
11. Turn your heat down and wear more sweaters!
12. Carpool!
13. Buy a hybrid.
14. Recycle! Plant trees — deciduous on south, evergreen on north side of house.
15. Only use lights when you're in the room.
16. Caulk your house.
17. Drive fewer miles.
18. Walk more!
19. Reuse & recycle!
20. The amount of energy saved when recycling 1 aluminum can run a TV for 3 hours.
21. Consider getting around on a motor scooter or motorcycle — preferably one under 500 cc.
22. Use compact fluorescent light bulbs!