



Times-News

The Smoking Gun of Fossil Fuels Leads to the New Green Energy Era

Monday, May 18, 2009

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Over a decade ago the world was shocked to learn that the tobacco industry had systematically spiked cigarettes to ensure addiction, launched targeted campaigns to attract children into lifetime tobacco dependence, and planted high profile smokers in every sphere of public life to protect their industry's survival. The most powerful weapon of all was the use of "scientific evidence" contesting any connection between smoking and lung cancer. What unraveled Big Tobacco more than anything else were not anti-smoker campaigns or lawsuits by dying smokers. Instead the Tobacco Institute's own records lead to their downfall, which documented over half a century of scientific evidence that proved smoking was the leading cause of lung, throat and over a dozen other cancers.

Several weeks ago, a new revelation is rocking the planet. A trade group representing a coalition of oil, coal, power and auto industries, who had been engaged in a massive marketing and lobbying campaign since the 1990s opposing the notion that climate change was manmade, had in fact determined irrefutably that they were wrong. "The scientific basis for the Greenhouse Effect and the potential impact of human emissions of greenhouse gases such as CO₂ on climate is well established and cannot be denied" quotes a technical study conducted by the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) which was funded by industries who profited from fossil fuels.

Coal is one of the cheapest energy sources producing over 60% of the energy needs of residents in the South. The first restriction on coal use dates back to the 13th century during King Edward's reign. He imposed the death penalty to anyone using coal because it was believed that it gave off poisonous odors. That bias against coal use continued for nearly two centuries.

Cheap energy has been the motor for the American economy for generations. But cheap for whom? Millions of coal miners have died or suffered the debilitating effects of black lung disease. Coal mining disasters, company towns, poverty pay, smog, deaths from asthma, emphysema, and polluted drinking water all add to the as-yet-uncalculated costs of cheap energy. What if coal mining companies and the power companies who depend on coal were made responsible for its consequences? What if every mountain that was destroyed had to be built back? What if every watershed that had become a dead zone had to be remediated? What if every asthma death related to particulate pollution had to be compensated? What would the cost of coal be if the cost of doing business included coal's black mark on society?

Fortunately in 2009 we have a choice. We are beginning an era of green energy that no longer need rely on the half-truths and ignorance of the past. Although national policy still calls for major increases in power plant constructions, there are alternatives, some based on lifestyle changes and some requiring policy initiatives. According to the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, energy efficiency is the most effective and readily available source of clean energy. North Carolina can effectively offset the need to build new power plants by making homes, businesses and factories more efficient, and by expanding "energy recycling" at large commercial and industrial facilities. Similarly, by adopting fuel economy measures, transportation fuel use could drop by 43%.

There are many steps that individuals can take to become better stewards of the earth, beginning with home energy inspections to evaluate energy losses in the home. ECO members and members of our Project Green Light program are eligible for free or discounted prices on inspections. With the passage of the recent stimulus bill, homeowners can get financial benefits of up to \$1500 by employing home efficiency measures, and on the high end of the scale can install solar hot water or photo voltaic cells for 65% less than they cost last year, making a \$20,000 solar installation as little as \$6,000.

On the national scene there are some important bills currently being discussed in Washington that can make a big impact on moving the nation into the Green Energy Era. Energy efficiency is the cheapest, cleanest, fastest source of new American energy. Establishing a national energy efficiency resource standard (EERS) would encourage innovation, lower utility bills for American consumers and businesses, create new green jobs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost a lagging economy. According to a recent study by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, establishing a national EERS standard could save \$168 billion in utility bills, create 222,000 new permanent, high-quality jobs in construction and other fields, prevent the release of 262 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, analogous to taking 48 million cars off the roads for a year. The result could be 390 polluting power plants that would not need to be built.

What can you do? On the home front, get a home energy inspection today and join ECO's Project Green Light (692-0385). To support EERS, contact your representatives and ask them to support the current EERS bills in the House and Senate. Representative Heath Shuler can be reached at (202) 225-6401, Senator Richard Burr at (202)224-3154 and Senator Kay Hagan at (202) 224-6342. More information on this can be found at <http://energyefficiencyworks.org/>. Welcome to the new energy renaissance.

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