

Solar energy 'limitless'

BY KLAUS DOHRING, THE WINDSOR STAR APRIL 5, 2011 true

In the Windsor Star and other media I keep seeing the term "producing oil" being used, such as country X or company Y is "producing this much crude oil." No one produces crude oil.

The use of the word "producing" in connection with exploiting crude oil deposits is misleading. It gives the false impression that we can actually control how much crude oil is extracted, and that we can make more.

Crude oil was created and deposited millions and millions of years ago, over long time spans, by the slow degradation of accumulated biomass under lack of oxygen. What we use up in crude oil in one year today took over a million years to accumulate and hide away eons ago.

We extract crude oil, thereby depleting limited reserves. Imagine reading the term "Sau-di Arabia is depleting crude oil reserves at a rate of 12 million barrels a day." This sounds very different from the term "Saudi Arabia is producing 12 million barrels of crude oil per day."

The term "producing" implies that we can make more of it. For production we add a shift in a factory, expand a factory, launch a new factory, and we can produce more.

The word depleting is the much more accurate term, as we are depleting limited reserves. The rate of depletion is accelerating as we extract more. What we depleted yesterday is not available today. A leading U.S. geologist, M. King Hubbert, in 1956 predicted the depletion rate of oilfields, and coined the term "Hubbert's curve."

The Association for the Study of Peak Oil is concluding that the world is at the peak rate of global crude oil extraction, and that crude oil extraction rates will now start to decline due to depletion of the known major oilfields on the planet.

We should stop using the term "producing crude oil" and start calling it what it is, a depletion of limited resources.

In contrast, solar energy is limitless, and available for another five billion years. Free, clean, reliable and wherever people live, solar energy is available. The Renewable Energy Technology Center in Windsor does inform, it is open to the public and it showcases four operating solar systems. (More at www.RET-Center.com, or at 1680 Kildare Rd. in Windsor.)

We are at a tipping point as it relates to energy on this planet. The depletion of accessible fossil reserves with ever-increasing world hunger for energy will lead to rapid price escalation for fossil energy sources. The days of cheap energy are over.

Climate change is real, and the impact will be getting stronger and stronger. Nuclear energy is again showing the risks inherent in that technology, and we are learning the painful lesson that nothing is 100 per cent safe 100 per cent of the time.

The paradigm shift can only go toward sustainable forms of energy, with long-term viability and no damaging environmental impact and no inherent catastrophic risk. Solar energy will be key and centre in this shift.

By embracing solar and renewable energy technologies, Windsor and Essex County can become a strong manufacturing and supply hub for these up and coming technologies. The Ontario Green Energy Act is a forward-looking piece of legislation, and the creation of a new industry and many clean-tech applications will create new jobs in a new economy.

New investments need to go into clean and sustainable renewable energies, not into dirty tarsands or nuclear plants that may, or more likely may not, be ready in 10 years or more, and will pose a constant operating risk and hazardous waste materials that nobody wants.

We need to smarten up in our investment decisions, and now is the time to make that change.

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