

ENERGY: AMERICA'S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Energy: America's Past, Present, and Future

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In this rapidly changing world, we face many difficulties, not only as individuals, but as nations, and as members of the human race. One of the greatest challenges that we struggle with today is the energy crisis involving oil, gas, and coal. Following the energy frenzy of this past summer when Exxon, Conoco, Shell, BP America, and Chevron, known jointly as “big oil,” took on the role of the lead villain in American media, Americans began voicing their mounting concerns for the cost of living, and turned their full attention on the oil industry (B). Just as people become curious, and sometimes obsessive, about the lives of popular or controversial actors and actresses, the American public became fixated on energy concerns as gas prices skyrocketed and food and other goods followed.

How much does the United States alone depend on these energy sources? For “big oil” companies to become as powerful as they have there must be a higher demand for a product than can be produced quickly enough. The United States is fast depleting the already limited supply of natural resources available to it. As has been customary throughout history, villains like “big oil” are made to look more vicious than they truly are. The average image of “big oil” is of monopoly and greed, and a desire to produce as much money from the public as possible. In truth, the big oil companies only produce about 38% of the oil distilled in America each year, hardly monopolizing the industry (E). Despite popular belief that we, as a country, can exist independent of these energy resources, that option is next to impossible. Since the early 1920s when wood saw its decline in popularity as an energy source, the use of and need for coal, oil, and natural gas has been on the rise (F). Our desire to be free of the worry that comes with using limited resources does not negate their necessity in society. These resources are now entwined in our everyday lives, from the transportation we use to move between the grocery store and home, to turning on a light bulb in our house.

America, however, is not the only country where there is cause for concern in energy resource dilemmas. India and China, packed in claustrophobic clusters of vast cities, towns, and villages, contains well over one-sixth of the world's population. An increased standard of living and in turn energy demand could have an effect on the rest of the world's economic status. The Energy Information Administration projects an increase of approximately one million barrels per day in oil use, here in America within the next twenty years (A). This number may seem high, but when compared to the expected tripling of barrels of oil per day used in China in that same twenty years, it is apparent that the increased demand for essential resources in other countries is cause for concern (A). The projected increase in energy demands may be attributed to standard of living. In recent years China has been becoming a more prominent nation and the standard of living has improved as a result.

Money is but a simple matter to point out in the future problems with resources. A solution, however, is quite the opposite, especially for such an energy dependent/inclusive nation as ours. Though to what extent we should change our ways has been, and will likely continue to be, debated, conservation of these precious resources is the first step the world needs to take to correct energy problems. Should the United States cut the per capita consumption be cut in half our energy consumption would be on level with the United Kingdom (C). As an industrial nation our standard of living would suffer due to our profound dependence on energy.

Conservation is an important goal, but the best way to proceed is not always clear. For example, some would think that the act of turning off a light every time a room is left would be a step in the direction of conservation, however, depending upon the kind of light being used and the amount of time that it will be off must be considered. Incandescent light bulbs should be shut off when they are not in use. Fluorescent lights are less certain in terms of conservation. If

the room is left for fifteen minutes or more, the light should be turned off, but depending on the Watts of the light bulb and the amount of energy it takes to light the bulb determines the true value of turning them off (D).

In short, our nation and nations around the world will be facing some very real problems in the very near future. Energy may become a luxury that only the wealthiest in the world will have access to. World wars could be waged over the last resource-filled lands on our planet. Economies could be affected like we have never seen before. To prevent some of this global impact, alternative resources are being researched, but thus far, sources such as hydrogen would take as much of the energy sources that we already use to create. Only through a world-wide cooperative effort can we hope to find the answer leading to a cleaner, more efficient and brighter future.

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