

Sun's power key to energy needs

If the United States wins the solar revolution within 45 years one-fourth of the nation's power will come from the sun. So predicts John L. Wilhelm, who sees solar energy as mankind's ultimate powerhouse in the sun power races for the National Geographic Society.

Even today, he says, the infant solar industry heats and cools about 200 buildings in the United States, with inventors and manufacturers coming up with more efficient systems every day.

This year alone \$30 million or more will be spent working ways to convert sunshine into economical energy. By the end of the century, solar technology could fill about 10 percent of U.S. energy needs.

BUT WILHELM heard a warning from sun power engineer Dr. A. I. Miskovsky of Boston.

If we want to have solar energy in our society by the year 2000, we've got to teach energy technology, energy economics, energy management—and we've got to begin today, otherwise we'll never have a solar revolution.

With that lesson learned here is how—according to Wilhelm—Americans could be using sun power for 25 percent of their energy needs by the year 2000.

Almost half of it would come directly from the sun collected in a variety of ways for heating and cooling.

ABOUT a quarter of the needs would

come from what solar engineers call biomass fuels—energy plantations of such fast-growing trees as cottonwood, poplar, or eucalyptus raised for fueling steam generators. Another biomass could be kelp, the giant seaweed that is the world's fastest-growing plant.

The rest of the solar energy could be produced largely by steam generators run directly by concentrating the sun's rays with mirrors and lenses, and by solar cells or photoelectric units that turn sunshine directly into electricity.

Additional sun power could come from harnessing the wind—caused by the world's enormous convection currents set up by the sun—and by using the sun-heated ocean currents to boil ammonia that would drive turbines.

USING THE SUN to help heat or cool the house is still too expensive for most homeowners. But Wilhelm says solar heating experts told him costs should drop significantly within five years.

Good insulation is critical in home energy savings. The National Bureau of Standards estimates that 500,000 barrels of oil could be saved daily if all U.S. houses were properly insulated.

The energy demands of the next 25 years, says Wilhelm, will be as much as all the energy mankind has used throughout history. However, the solar resources are greater: one year of sun power shining on the Arabian Peninsula alone is more than twice the world's total oil reserves.

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Tax relief available for elderly, others

Senior citizens and others who do not have to file income tax returns are reminded that they can now file for property tax relief.

The 1973 property tax relief law reduced the tax burden on people who pay more than a certain percentage of their household income in property taxes.

For most, the cutoff point is 3.5 percent of household income; they are entitled to a rebate of 60 percent of the residential property taxes they pay above that amount.

For senior citizens, the rebate is 100 percent of the excess, and for senior citizens who receive less than \$6,000 per year, the basic 3.5 percent cutoff point is lowered on a sliding scale according to the amount of income.

Most Michigan residents claim their rebates when they file their annual income tax returns. For those who do not have to pay the state income tax, an application form can be obtained from the State Department of Treasury.

It is important that senior citizens who do not have to file income tax returns realize that this can file beginning in December and get their rebate in time to use it toward payment of their local property taxes.

Governor William Milliken said: "Those eligible must report the year's total income and the amount of the property tax. For those whose only source of income is Social Security, the year's final income figure can be obtained from the December check."

State assistance can be obtained by calling the Individual Income Tax Division of the Michigan Department of Treasury at 317-373-2610. Treasury personnel will refer callers to the department's nearest district office for personal assistance.

Senior citizens can call the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging at 317-373-2251 for help.

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