

U.S.: 'complacent about energy'?

By Penny Wright
special writer

Remember when service stations limited the amount of gasoline you could buy at one filling? Or when industrial plants were closed due to heating oil shortages? And when President Nixon said it was our patriotic duty as Americans to dial thermostats down to 64 degrees?

Those were the results of an embargo set by Arab oil exporting nations. For six months from the end of 1973 through the early months of 1974, the United States and the rest of the oil-importing world endured the drastic consequences of restricted oil supplies.

Edward Lumsdaine, the new dean of the school of engineering at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, discussed in an interview what effects the oil embargo has had on this country over the past 10 years.

LUMSDAINE BRINGS a worldview to the topic of energy supply and demand. A Southfield resident, Lumsdaine was reared in Shanghai, China, until age 15.

After his family moved to the United States, he attended New Mexico State University and eventually earned a doctorate of science degree in 1966. Prior to moving to Michigan, Lumsdaine lived in Knoxville, where he taught mechanical engineering at the University of Tennessee.

During that period, he headed the university's Energy, Environment and Resource Center, traveling to more than 30 countries including, Egypt, India and China, to lecture on

the proper uses of precious energy resources. He found complex relationships between energy resources and the political and economic structures of nations. Lumsdaine has come to believe that energy is linked to everything else, and countries that have the most energy resources, also have the most political and economic power.

QUESTION: It is now 10 years after the Arab oil embargo. How would you describe the energy situation in this country?

ANSWER: "Right now it's deteriorating. We are becoming more complacent about energy again. Though we are using less total energy than projected 10 years ago, we are still wasting a lot."

"Our oil consumption is up, and we are importing up to 50 percent of what we consume. That is more than we did before the embargo."

QUESTION: In light of stabilizing prices for oil products, is complacency so dangerous?

ANSWER: "This may be an irresponsible statement, but I believe we have five years to put things in order or we are going to be faced with energy shortages."

QUESTION: Why?

ANSWER: "I can count at least three reasons that suggest our oil supplies will be in future jeopardy."

"First, we have already lost a lot of oil from the Middle East, namely from Iran."

"Second, many of the countries that export oil to us have unstable governments."

"And third, the oil producers will have to cut down their supply because oil reserves are limited."

QUESTION: Should consumers be pressuring Washington for new energy programs?

ANSWER: "Don't ask the government to do that. They will just set up another bureaucracy. It has to be a community — people like you and me. We have to demand lower energy consumption rates."

"For example, we can demand a certain level of energy performance from the house we buy or build. Now, the government can respond to this demand by removing bureaucratic roadblocks."

QUESTION: Do you have any specific restrictions in mind?

ANSWER: "Yes. As it is now, you cannot get a FHA or VA loan on a home without a conventional back-up furnace. We are trying to sell our solar home in Knoxville, and even though it is well-built, tightly insulated and was chosen as a model solar design by the Tennessee Valley Authority, it doesn't qualify for a government loan. That's insane."

QUESTION: What are the chances of consumers starting to demand higher energy performance standards?

ANSWER: "It really has to hit the pocket-book before that will happen. People have got

ten used to increases in energy costs, and have grown complacent."

"Here in the United States the amount of money most of us spend on energy is still small compared to our income. In Europe, a gallon of gas costs \$2.50 to \$3. People are forced to drive small cars."

QUESTION: You teach a course at UM-Dearborn called "Resources: Energy, Environment and People." Tell me about it.

ANSWER: "Students learn that all three — energy use, environment and people — have to cooperate or there will be trouble. A good example is the situation in China."

"In rural areas, wood-burning cookstoves operate at typically 3-percent to 5-percent efficiency. With minor modifications the efficiency could be improved to 20 percent, but that would mean a break with tradition so it has not happened."

"The demand for cooking fuel supplies is contributing to the deforestation of China. In some areas when the grass gets an inch-and-a-half tall, it is cut for burning."

"Practices like this bare the soil to erosion which eventually causes all sorts of problems for the critically needed hydro plants. The situation is serious."

QUESTION: I have heard you say that the kind of person you are depends upon the amount of energy you use.

ANSWER: "I do believe that the energy you use and the way you use it make you different."

"Growing up in China, I used almost no energy at all. We had no car, one or two light bulbs, and hot water had to be heated on the stove."

"I thought at the time I was well-to-do. I never felt something was missing from my life."

"Now if I returned to that environment I would be terribly uncomfortable. Once we get used to a certain level of energy usage it takes a crisis to bring changes."

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