

# ORANGEVILLE CITIZEN

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YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER SINCE 1974

**Editorial**

August 3, 2006

## Energy conservation: easier said than done?

LIKE MOTHERHOOD, energy conservation is something that no one

seemingly opposes, yet at least half the population seems utterly incapable of accomplishing it.

North Americans have supposedly been aware of the need to conserve fossil fuels since at least the Arab oil embargoes of the 1970s, yet today most of the vehicles we see on the roads (usually with only one occupant) are large vans and SUVs that use at least twice as much fuel as the typical subcompact car.

As for electrical energy, it seems the same 30-plus years have been spent debating whether there really is any need for new generating stations, Ontario Hydro having vastly overestimated the rate of growth in demand when oil and natural gas prices began to soar.

Today, everyone seems to agree that the province will indeed need more generating capacity, the main question being whether it should be in the form of new nuclear power plants, imports from new hydroelectric stations in Quebec, Manitoba and Labrador, or a host of new wind farms of the sort we now have in Melancthon.

But just how much new generating capacity will be required will obviously depend on several factors, among them the reliability of the generating sources, the level of demand and when that demand peaks.

Perhaps the most dramatic change in Ontario has been the movement away from peak demand periods

being on the coldest days of the year. Today, the growing popularity of air conditioning - perhaps enhanced by unusually warm summer weather - has led to the province experiencing even higher demands during hot spells.

One of the most realistic campaigns we've witnessed is Dufferin's student-run Reduce The Juice program, which this year will attempt to duplicate a success enjoyed in Shelburne last year, when the town's households achieved an average 5 per cent reduction in electrical consumption. The students have already begun a door-to-door campaign to encourage Orangeville residents to lower their electricity consumption by five per cent this summer.

The determined group of 15 young people who recently introduced themselves to the public at Orangeville Hydro's office were joined by Peter Love, chief energy conservation officer with the Conservation Bureau, a division of the Ontario Power Authority, who had cited the success Reduce The Juice experienced in Shelburne in a report he produced called the Conservation Challenge, saying it proved that grassroots movements can make a difference.

The team has wasted no time getting started, having visited more than 900 homes in Orangeville in the week before the public launch. Sarah Fairlie, one of the Reduce the Juice (RTJ) university team leaders, said people "are recognizing us at their doors and are very willing to take the pledge to reduce."

The RTJ team used the public forum to explain their door-to-door campaign, letting people know when to expect them in their neighbourhood and how to contact them. Planned goals include a visit to at least 5,000 homes and getting to speak to 1,500 individuals about energy conservation.

The students have all been trained in energy conservation techniques and say they can help residents reduce their power consumption in a number of ways.

"Some people decide to change to compact fluorescent bulbs, others decide to use a set-back thermostat - there are lots of easy ways to be more energy efficient," said Pheobe Lusk, an RTJ team leader and fourth-year student at the University of Guelph. "But everybody is interested for at least two reasons. They want to save money and they want to help stop air pollution."

It will be interesting, indeed, to see not just whether the 5 per cent target can be achieved, but whether

the reduction will be permanent. It may well turn out that what happened in the automotive industry will be duplicated in the electrical industry.

The initial "energy shock" in the 1970s led to many changes, ranging from lower speed limits on the highways to the introduction of smaller cars and more efficient internal combustion engines. However, all those savings were more than wiped out by the advent of two and three-car families and manufacturers' introduction of more powerful cars and the gas-guzzling SUVs.

Today, there may be a similar trend in electricity, particularly if the car manufacturers move toward "plug-in" hybrids which would use nightly-charged batteries for commutes that now are gasoline-powered.

In similar vein, there's a real possibility that the growing concern over violent crimes will lead to a push for improved street lighting. And who knows how many new electrical gadgets will find their way into homes that once had little more than lights, radios, toasters, refrigerators and stoves?

As we see it, there's far more potential for energy conservation in the transportation field than in electricity, but even there it won't happen without a lot of government regulation.

As a starter, there should be much higher taxation of inefficient vehicles along with much lower taxation of the hybrids and other fuel-efficient cars.

Beyond that, governments at all levels should be doing much more to encourage the use of public transit, since it obviously requires a lot less energy to move 100 people in a transit bus or rapid transit coach than the same 100 people in 60 or so private vehicles.

At this time of the year, we also should be thinking about the need to reduce the huge volumes of gasoline being consumed on our lakes and rivers by boats with over-sized engines and single-person pleasure craft.

The sad truth seems to be that although everyone claims to be in favour of energy conservation, precious few of us really practise it.

