



Serendipity: We Have the Energy

By **KAREN TELLEEN-LAWTON, NOOZHAWK COLUMNIST** | Posted on 10/03/2008

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Using technologies that already exist or are on the horizon, we can become "Fossil-free by '33."

When the hot air generated by the presidential campaigns has dissipated, Santa Barbarans will save energy by viewing less Internet and TV news. But we can save even more by tuning in to the [Community Environmental Council's](#) "Fossil-Free by '33" campaign. If achieved, Santa Barbara can become one of the pre-eminent sources for energy solutions in the United States. How can the greatest and least among us get on board for energy sustainability in 25 years?



Karen Telleen-Lawton

Tam Hunt, the CEC's energy program director, is convinced that we can achieve "Fossil-free by '33" using technologies that already exist or are on the horizon, if the public demands it. So what's in it for John and Jane Q. Public?

The crux is, fossil fuels produce a litany of side effects. We've heard many of them, but perhaps not as succinctly as the CEC delivers it. Chief among them are health effects including respiratory problems, heat-related deaths and illnesses, the spread of disease and drought. Environmental effects of burning fossil fuels include air and water pollution, climate change and species loss — my big issue. Economy-wise, our fossil fuel demand requires more money with dwindling supply, a huge portion of our national security dollars, and property loss and skyrocketing insurance claims from carbon-induced climate change.

Energy's global reach seems to thwart local and individual efforts to improve. But CEC officials say otherwise, and they back their words with measurable goals. What is great, according to Hunt, is that the goals are achievable and we're already on our way.

Hunt predicts a 3 percent reduction in fuel use in 2008 alone: well on the way to the interim 2010 goal of a 10 percent reduction in projected use. "A lot of this reduction can be attributed to higher energy prices resulting in conservation and better choices in car purchases," he says.

For homes and businesses, [Edison](#) is partnering with local government to spread the word about energy efficiency. This outreach effort is being transformed into a resource program that will have numerical goals for energy efficiency improvements.

Then there is industry-level change. A wind farm in Lompoc passed the county's planning department by a vote of 5-0 on Tuesday. Acciona, the Spanish company that owns the project, hopes to begin construction in the spring. As Hunt and Megan Birney explained for Noozhawk ([click here](#) to read their commentary), we most likely will achieve our large-scale wind energy goal, generating 11.9 billion kWh by 2020, if this is approved and built. The project's price would be lower than clean coal and comparable to nuclear power.

There's also solar, an abundant resource on the South Coast. "We see three major utility-scale solar projects up in the Carrizo Plains," Hunt says. They use mirrors instead of photovoltaic cells, so heat passes through the turbines. As with wind power, there are environmental issues to solve, but the three projects would generate far more power than San Luis Obispo requires, allowing Santa Barbara to help meet its goals through purchase.

I can't help but come back to the economy, where the environment meets the pencil. An economic analysis for Santa Barbara County finds that the county as a whole would save more than \$1.5 billion each year by 2030 in a fossil-free future. By 2020, the county would save \$418 million each year — equivalent to \$830 per person each year.

In fact, companies such as clipper Windpower, the Solar Energy Company, REC Solar and American Ethanol are among the local environmental companies creating hundreds

of jobs in the past few years. On the household side, there is an embarrassment of rich options, from passive solar water heat to fluorescent bulbs to fuel efficient automobiles.

Demand it from your government, and demand it for yourself. It's a win-win for Santa Barbara, and that's definitely sustainable.

Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. Graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon at www.canyonvoices.com.