

Ann Arbor News “Your World” column for 6-27-05

Michigan is an energy-dependent state—we have to import almost 100% of the coal, uranium, and oil that we consume, as well as about three-fourths of the natural gas. This represents a major financial drain on our state--since 2000, market prices for fossil fuels have more than doubled.

Our state and municipal government can lead the way in improving energy efficiency. Doing so not only helps cash-strapped governmental budgets, it reduces air and water pollution as well. Awareness of the importance of this is rising, e.g. dangerous mercury from coal-burning is contaminating Michigan’s fish, and our state’s greenhouse gas emissions are on the rise (by 9% from 1990 to 2002, according to a recent University of Michigan study).

This past Earth Day Governor Granholm announced a directive to reduce energy use by 20% over ten years in State of Michigan facilities and operations. Measures which will be implemented to achieve this goal:

- Each state building will be analyzed for its energy use, resulting in conversions to energy-efficient lighting, improved thermal insulation in building exteriors, and the purchase of Energy Star compliant appliances and office equipment.
- Measures will be taken to reduce wasting of water and unnecessary use of lighting, heating and cooling systems. Systems will be maintained regularly to ensure optimum efficiency.
- Alternative Fuel and hybrid vehicles will be required for the State fleet, and only the highest percentage of biodiesel content available will be purchased for diesel vehicles.
- Life-cycle costs (the purchase price plus the estimated operating costs over its useful life) will be factoring in when determining which energy-using appliances and systems represent the best value for the State of Michigan.
- All new construction and renovation of state-owned facilities, universities, and community colleges, will be required to follow guidelines developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Highlights of similar efforts by our local governments:

- The Ann Arbor area has 900 municipal, university, and school vehicles running on alternative fuels (primarily biodiesel and ethanol). Last year this program saved almost one million gallons of fossil fuel.
- The City of Ann Arbor’s Energy Fund lends money for energy improvements to municipal buildings, which so far has saved the City \$500,000 in energy costs. The program is self-sustaining, as loans are paid back with the resulting energy

savings.

- Washtenaw County is installing a solar photovoltaic system at the County's Western Service Center on Zeeb Road, which will provide clean, renewable energy for the building's use. The installation is scheduled for October, although the solar panel is on backorder (their growing use by Japan and Europe has created a world shortage).

These forward-thinking governmental initiatives will reap payoffs to both taxpayers and our environment, but are only a small portion of what needs to be done. To be truly effective, businesses and homeowners must follow suit. For links on how to do this, search for: "Waste Knot Energy Conservation" from the Washtenaw County home page, at [www.ewashtenaw.org](http://www.ewashtenaw.org).

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