

Watt's Happening?

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Signs of Hope



Surveys show that most people are ready for a switch to clean energy and are willing to pay more to help the transition. Some governments however, busily making a quick buck on fossil fuels, are dragging their heels, proving once again that “not all the fossils are in the fuel.”

United Nations climate summits are always a sign of hope. Nations from around the world meet and profess to take climate disruption seriously, and the issues finally break through into mainstream media.

Canada made a dismal showing at the latest round of talks, however. Our prime minister did not attend, and a presentation by

our federal energy minister was essentially ignored. Everybody knows that Canada is headed in the wrong direction, except, apparently, Canada. Positioning ourselves to become THE major carbon emitter on planet Earth is not a popular move, because everybody will pay the price for our bad decisions.

Global carbon emissions continue to increase, and

quickly. Overall, carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere are up 40 percent from the time of the industrial revolution, but disturbingly, one quarter of that increase has occurred since the year 2000.

Things are getting worse, but at the same time they're getting better. Lets have a look at some signs of hope and genuine action from around the world.

CLIMATE MARCH SETS RECORD

In September, some 400,000 people converged on New York City for the People's Climate March, the largest such march in history. More than 2000 climate events occurred in 166 countries, including 150 rallies across Canada.

BIG COMPANIES TAKE THE LEAD

Although some countries are dragging their heels around carbon pricing, big companies and investors are stepping forward to take the lead. A week before the latest UN climate summit, 3478 investors overseeing more than USD\$24 trillion in assets pledged to support "stable, reliable and economically meaningful carbon pricing," strengthen regulations for renewable-energy deployment, and more. Soon after, more than 1,000 institutional investors, financial institutions and companies (including leading oil companies and airlines) endorsed calls for putting a strong price on carbon pollution and boosting clean-energy investment.

ALBERTANS SICK OF COAL

A recent poll shows that 80 percent of Alberta residents want to get coal off their grid in favour of wind and solar. Two-thirds of residents say they are prepared to pay more for electricity, if needed, to make the switch. I'll bet the same could be said for most Canadians.

BATTERY BREAKTHROUGH

Scientists at the University of Southern California have developed a water-based organic battery that uses no metals and no toxic materials. It is ideally suited to large-scale energy storage, which will make evening-out the intermittent nature of renewables safe, cheap and easy.

The breakthrough centered around electro-active chemicals called quinones, oxidized organic

compounds, found in plants, fungi and bacteria, which are used in photosynthesis and cellular respiration – the chemicals that nature uses for energy transfer.

Electric current is generated between tanks of these electro active liquids separated by a membrane. The batteries last for about 5000 recharge cycles, five times more than lithium ion batteries and cost one tenth as much to manufacture. Patents are applied for and large-scale versions are in the works.

SEIMENS REACHES 10 GW

Wind power continues to be the fastest growing energy source in the world. Seimens has been building and installing wind turbines in North and South America since 2005. They have recently passed the 10,000-megawatt mark, having placed 5,630 turbines in 110 operational wind projects. That's enough to power about 3 million homes. Other large wind power companies who started earlier, like Vestas and Enercon, passed this milestone long ago.

NO COSTS ADDED

Yet another global commission has concluded that fixing climate disruption should cost essentially nothing to the global economy. The study found that strong policies like carbon pricing, encouraging renewables with subsidies while phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, etc., would cost the global economy five percent more than would have been spent anyway, but if health care costs are factored in, the changes would end up saving money.

Clearly, technological answers to our climate and pollution problems are not as remote or as difficult as some would have us believe, and most folks are ready for a change to clean energy. We're in this together, sharing a little ball of rock and a common destiny. Even a tiny bit of leadership is all it would take.