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CONCLUSION

Although the full effects of energy shortages are not yet apparent, a crisis exists and the decisions which will lead to adequate supplies of energy in the future must be made today. Therefore we regard the present energy crisis as a time of great potential for creating long term solutions to rising energy needs. Before rational changes can occur, information is needed on the existing situation and trends for the future. Various alternatives need to be studied and analyzed. This is what we have attempted to do in the area of energy availability and use in the Bay Area.

We have seen that traditional energy sources (fossil fuels, hydroelectric, geothermal) are not long term resources. There are not enough additional supplies to cover all needs as Bay Area energy demand increases. Thus, we looked at various new technologies which can supplement the present sources. Of these, solar energy is the most promising, although the era of its widespread use is not yet at hand. With more engineering and scientific study solar energy can become a viable alternative. In twenty years it could provide for a substantial portion of our energy needs.

Nuclear energy is not a panacea. Besides the environmental dangers, it has hidden economic costs and is not a long term answer. In the Bay Area the expansion of nuclear energy supplies will probably not increase in the future. For the present, it seems we must rely on a combination of sources to supply energy, with renewable sources replacing non-renewable ones over time.

Conservation is an important issue in the energy question. In the Bay Area the conservation potential is fairly substantial in all sectors. Most important, we found that considerable savings can occur through increasing efficiency rather than radically changing our lifestyles. Conservation, however, is not a solution to the crisis, but a way of alleviating its pressure in the short run. Still, a conservation ethic is necessary for a long term social energy policy, since our wasteful habits and technologies have contributed to the crisis.

Policy decisions on all levels have led to our present situation. Major energy suppliers have controlled policy-making for purposes of profit and expansion rather than public benefit. Policies have not been aimed at solutions nor the use of renewable resources. They do not account for all costs of energy supply and use. Subsidies, for example, should be shifted from potentially harmful, exhaustible sources to cleaner renewable ones.

Equitable policy decisions, however, cannot be made without a comprehensive body of information on all aspects of energy demand and supply. In our research we often found that such information was lacking. It took considerable effort to discover, for example, how fossil fuels were supplied, distributed and consumed in the Bay Area. Such information is necessary in order to construct energy policies on all levels.

Many questions need to be answered relating to energy supply and consumption. For example, should more fossil fuel power plants be built in the Bay Area? Who will suffer if there are severe shortages?

What can be done about energy monopolization? What will happen if all costs of energy are made real? Such questions need to be realistically answered in order to formulate energy policies which will face up to the crisis situation at hand. Our study of the Bay Area is a beginning toward finding answers. It illuminates some of the weak points of the present energy situation and points toward possible long-term solutions.