

Cut back to save energy

From driving city vehicles less to limiting the number of nights you light up the local ball field, cities and towns can take small steps to save energy during these difficult economic times.

By A.E. (Al) Johnson

Everything we do in our daily life requires energy. Our bodies burn calories when we exercise. The food that provides those calories is grown on a farm with an electric irrigation pump and a diesel-fueled tractor for cultivation. The harvested product is transported to a processor that converts the product into a food source, which is then packaged and transported to the market place.

All energy sources are in competition. The original big three energy sources were coal, oil and natural gas, all of which can be converted into electricity, a secondary source of energy that can also be produced using hydro and nuclear power. We now have coming on the scene geothermal power as well as wind power, which has been used in other countries with high energy costs for many years.

With the increase in oil prices, other sources of energy have been able to tap and recover marginal supplies because the market will support a higher price.

When the cost of energy is going up rapidly, it is not possible to have a good economy. The high energy cost in manufacturing, production, and transporting overshadows improved productivity and technology resulting in higher prices.

If you have a lot of money, it is easier to save energy. All you have to do is buy more fuel efficient vehicles and equipment, add additional insulation and introduce alternate energy sources. Cities, unfortunately, don't often have a lot of extra money to spend.

What are some things that cities can do to cut their energy costs? Let's start with the street department. This first recommendation is very difficult for me to make: Forego the asphalt overlay program. Replace the overlay program with crack sealing and leave the money in your budget for next year so you can have the potential of

doubling the overlay program when prices fall.

Avoid using oversized or old, inefficient pieces of equipment. Reduce the street-side mowing area, and eliminate one mowing cycle.

Wait until after the high summer driving season to purchase bulk fuel. Consider a four-day work week during the summer and reduce the number of vehicles being driven from the shop to the job site.

Next, let's look at solid waste. Ask residents to group their trash containers in threes, and ask people in cul-de-sacs to place their containers together. Reduce the number of special pick-up days to one every two weeks.

Check your total energy costs to recycle. It may be necessary to selectively recycle until the situation improves.

If you are operating a landfill, consider opening a cell closer to your scales and shop to cut down on the haul distance.

The parks department can help save energy as well. Cut back on the amount of late night activities that require lighted fields and facilities. Cut back on the amount of grounds keeping and only maintain playing fields' fan areas and designated path ways. Consider alternating your parks and closing each location one night a week.

The police department can simply cut down the number of miles cruisers drive. These miles can be reduced in the areas that have the lowest crime rates.

Good luck in these tough economic times!



Contact Al Johnson, P.E., staff engineer, at 501-374-7492. He is available to consult with member cities and towns for one on-site consultation a year as a service of your Arkansas Municipal League.