

OPINION EDITORIAL

SECURING BC'S ELECTRICITY FUTURE STARTS WITH YOU

By Richard Neufeld

Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources

June 1, 2006

We pass rows of blue recycling boxes on our streets and don't give them a second glance. For most of us, recycling is now second nature. But it wasn't always the case. "Reduce, re-use, recycle" took us a few years to adopt.

Imagine if we could be as aware of energy issues and embrace electricity conservation in the same way that we've adopted our blue boxes.

Some might ask, what's the urgency to conserve electricity? After all, for more than four decades, our province has enjoyed the advantage of clean, low-cost reliable hydroelectricity. For the short-term our province has enough electricity to meet our needs. But as our province continues to grow, meeting our electricity needs in the longer term will require sound planning, much discussion and balanced decision-making.

In British Columbia, planning for our future energy needs is well underway. Later this year, you will see our government's updated Energy Plan. Electricity, which is so fundamentally important to our economic well-being and quality of life, will be a key part of the plan.

As a government, we announced earlier this year our intention to return British Columbia to electricity self-sufficiency within the decade. In a world that requires more energy every day, we can't leave our electricity supply to chance. BC Hydro forecasts that in the next 20 years, the province will need between 25 and 45 per cent more electricity, enough to power 1.4 to 2.5 million new homes. That may seem like a lot, but when we look at how much our economy has grown in the last two decades, it only makes sense that we do our homework today to leave our children a secure legacy for the future.

While we consider the options and the trade-offs available to meet B.C.'s increasing electricity demand, we can begin to help offset that demand through increased conservation. While planning new generation sources will take time, using what we already have more wisely is the one thing we can all do right now to make sure we have more electricity in the future.

Through BC Hydro's Power Smart program, we're helping to create a conservation culture in B.C. Whether it's turning off a light or installing more energy efficient appliances, every conscious decision we make to conserve electricity is vitally important. Every hour of electricity power we save is one less that BC Hydro has to either buy or build. It's like money in your pocket.

An energy efficient lifestyle starts at home. Most homes consume more energy than necessary because of outdated construction materials, windows, heating and cooling systems. To help solve this problem, we were the first government in Canada to release an Energy Efficiency in Buildings Strategy. It's as simple and inexpensive as applying weather stripping on draughty doorways and window openings or turning down the thermostat at night. Installing high efficiency furnaces and windows can make a big difference, too.

Increasingly, we are also looking at how building design can increase energy efficiency and help manage rising energy costs while at the same time improving the indoor air quality and comfort. We are leading the way with our plans to make energy efficiency work for B.C.

To make your energy efficiency improvements easier, the provincial government provides a number of subsidies, rebates and tax incentives. Measures like replacing standard lights with energy efficient compact fluorescent lights make a difference. To take it one step further, how about installing solar lights in your yard? I did this a few months ago, and they work very well. Information about programs to help you make your home more energy efficient is available on our website at www.empr.gov.bc.ca.

Planning for a secure energy future is everybody's business – not just government's. What are we waiting for? It's time to think about our choices for the future. Conservation is an action we can all take starting today. And soon, it will become second nature, just like recycling.

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.