

Points of View

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

Architects: A Natural and Renewable Energy Resource

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Many of you reading this are too young to have been practicing—if not too young to have been driving a car—to remember the 1970s and early '80s. For those of you who do remember, it was a dramatic and, for some of us, pivotal time in our practices.

For years, we had been told by our mechanical and electrical engineers that it was of little consequence how we oriented and insulated our creations. Their mantra: "Seal'em up and turn on the lights. Leave the rest to us. And whatever you do, be sure the windows are inoperable. That will surely disrupt the delicate air distribution balance and create climatic chaos. Energy is both plentiful and cheap."

Wake-up call

Then, the wake up call—the Arab oil embargo. Our domestic oil production had long since been inadequate to supply our heating, power generation, and transportation needs, and we had become increasingly dependent on the Middle East and its OPEC partners.

Suddenly, the questions came: How did we let this happen? Are the planet's oil, coal, and natural gas really finite rather than inexhaustible? What do we do now? And to those who believed that nuclear energy would become the ultimate panacea, Three Mile Island and concerns about nuclear waste disposal raised giant and even scarier questions.

Positive response: Then

The AIA's response was solid, thoughtful, and positive. An energy committee was created. Energy-saving design standards and techniques were developed, and alternative and renewable energy sources were promoted. Major programs to educate the profession and the public were instituted at both national and state levels. We were out front, and we made a difference.

Our efforts were reinforced and supported by the Carter administration, the creation of the Solar Energy Research Institute (SERI), and programs such as Owens Crossing's energy conservation awards. We demonstrated that massive amounts of energy could be saved while still creating handsome struc-

tures and comfortable and stimulating living/working environments.

The Gray Years

Then came the Gray Years with the de-emphasis of subsequent administrations on energy conservation and a renewed dependency on fossil fuels. Somehow, agencies like SERI survived and continued to do excellent research. SERI even achieved national laboratory designation and better funding.

However, these were the exceptions at the national level. In the meantime, a relatively small but dedicated group of architects and a number of private, state, and local entities kept the faith. And they expanded the energy conservation issue to be more inclusive and supportive of a broader sustainable/green design ethic.

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More wake-up calls— and a chance to lead

Now, with such secondary wake-up calls as California's rolling blackouts and escalating costs for petroleum products and natural gas, we have a second opportunity to respond—and this time to lead, to *really* lead—in taking the building sector, and indeed the broader issue of community design to a new era of sustainability.

Positive response: Now

As this is written, the AIA is giving testimony to the U.S. Department of Energy on the current administration's proposed energy policy. Our testimony supports the resolution sponsored by our Committee on the Environment and others, which was passed at the Convention in Denver. It offers the AIA's assistance to the president and Congress in the development of national policy initiatives to improve energy efficiency in building design, to promote alternative energy sources, and to create architecture and urban design conservation standards and construction practices.

For more than 20 years, we have been quietly coming to understand how to create not only energy-efficient and sustainable structures, but entire handsome and livable communities as well. Taking a leadership position in the emerging debate is an opportunity to put our acquired knowledge at the service of client and community. It is a unique moment in our history, a moment that can best be seized by America's architects by positive, focused, and collective action through the AIA. ■■■