

Something Puzzling

Published in Green Fire, July 2009

Something puzzling is behind the clamor for green energy. It is powered by politics and subsidies not thirst for natural energy. No one notices the beautiful, cost-effective traditional use of the sun, given up as we subsidize the generation of solar electricity and wind power.

The most obvious defeat is daylight. We build walls and roofs without skylights or windows. New shopping centers have acres of such roofs with electric lights on all day during sunny weather. These buildings which disregard well known traditional use of the sun, unnecessarily gobble up the electricity generated by the solar power plants. The contradiction could not be more apparent than in the blank windowless walls of the new Schott solar factory rising at Albuquerque's Mesa del Sol development.

Worse than the waste of money for electricity is the spell cast by the fluorescent bulbs. This electric spell is widespread and effective. It swallows each of us when we step through another electric door to enter another fluorescent sales belly.

Along with the many tours of green buildings we need a shame parade for the acres and acres of Lowes, Office Max, Walgreens, Staples, Pep Boys and dozens of other chain stores which have their electric lights on all day, every day. Why subsidize grid connected photovoltaic panels when the grid merely feeds an electric sewer?

Wal Mart, to their credit is an exception. They use prismatic light-diffusing skylights and leave their lights off on sunny days.

It takes the same electricity for the mundane task of drying a quantity of water as it does to lift it 146 miles, yet clothes lines which dry the clothes simply holding them in the air are forgotten or even outlawed while solar electricity which might have had high value off grid at remote sites ends drying clothes.

Everything assumes we must use electricity, yet we hardly had electricity a mere century ago. I worry about these puzzles because at Zomeworks we have tried to modify and expand non-electric passive uses of nature. Inexpensive solar water heaters, reflector shades for skylights and windows. We have test buildings that stay cool in the hot Albuquerque summer by radiating heat to the night sky. No fans, no pumps, no drafts. These are similar to our Cool Cell metal cabinets which cool batteries and electronics and which we sell around the world to international corporations. It is odd that we are more successful selling passive equipment to take care of machinery than people.

When I become discouraged with our failure to interest the public in reflector shades for skylights, passive heliostats for day-lighting, passive solar water heating, I remind myself that we are fighting to avoid a huge detour of nature. How can our products succeed when windows and skylights with centuries of success behind them are losing out to light bulbs fed by subsidized green power.

We already know how to do daylighting. All over Albuquerque there are old buildings with good day- lighting. If the car companies told us we must drive because people can't walk barefoot, we might remember that we already wear

shoes. However, when it comes to day-lighting, clotheslines, passive heating and cooling, our past successes are forgotten and new subsidized industries are created.

News of solar energy from television and the press usually concerns contrived State subsidized business opportunities, Energy Policy. It may be better for your local utility that you light your shop with light bulbs powered by PV panels instead of windows but it isn't better for you or me.

We are in the midst of a silent impersonal revolution. Traditional, intimate, natural ways of using the sun are replaced by the synthetic. Big business, government and grid electricity for everything.

The green revolutionaries who staff this attack on tradition do so without understanding. How could they be mistaken, there are scientists who support them. The Green Revolutionaries don't expect anyone to take personally what is being done to them and their traditions in the name of science, progress and greenness but look around you.