

Same issues, Different Era

For me, 1973 was a pre-adolescent blissful life filled with neighborhood games, Marshall Dillon in black and white and Sunday lunch at Grandma's. Recently, I was reminded by an older colleague that today's news and gasoline prices are simply 1973 all over again.

Whatever your age, I believe it's important to look at the similarities:

- Prior to both 1973 and 2008 we enjoyed periods of low-cost energy, and our high usage levels reflected that.
- In 1973, gas-guzzling vehicles were standard on our nation's roads. In 2008, low-efficiency SUVs still crowd our highways.
- In both 1973 and 2008, we experienced high levels of dependence on foreign oil imports.
- In 1973, the world was experiencing political unrest and economic instabilities across the globe. In 2008, the situation is much the same. Only the locations are different.
- Low cost and high availability of energy made us complacent about conservation in the early seventies and in the first years of the 21st century.

With the similarities of these two eras, some 35 years apart, it might do us good to examine the lessons we learned from the 1973 energy crisis and apply and adapt them for today.

In the 1970s, low fuel costs and high availability lulled us into a false sense of security. Energy conservation was not a priority, because an energy crisis was inconceivable. In 2008, we know that an energy crisis is indeed upon us, and so we must all work together to use energy more wisely. This responsibility extends to everyone – from the lawmakers who set energy policy in Lansing to the utilities, such as your cooperative, who plan to meet your long-range energy needs, and to individual businesses and consumers. We all have an important role to play.

In the decade or two following the energy crisis of the 70's, automobile manufacturers turned out high fuel-efficiency vehicles, and Americans, fresh from the deprivation of the gas-rationing period, purchased these vehicles in droves. And it worked. The availability of gasoline rose. But we humans have short memories, and before long, we once longed to indulge our travel experience with roomier and more powerful vehicles. Thus was born the SUV, which dominates our roadways and my garage today.

At Cherryland Electric Cooperative, we are doing everything possible to keep your electricity affordable, by automating operations where possible and by setting reasonable budgets that do not sacrifice reliability and service. We have no control, however, over the market price of fuels needed to generate electricity. The cost of fuels such as natural gas, coal and even renewables are increasing, and many factors affect those prices.

Do we need to conserve electricity? Of course. Will that alone solve the energy crisis? Absolutely not. Conservation of electricity is just one avenue for managing your energy costs.

I only ask everyone to remember we all need to conserve energy of all types – from gasoline, to natural gas, to propane. Many types of fuel make up our nation's energy picture and affect our pocketbooks. Electricity prices will rise in the future but your co-op will always be looking out for you as best we can. You can help us keep costs more affordable by looking for ways to conserve all types of energy, not just electricity. Instead of coming full circle back to 1973, perhaps we can better set our sights on a new longer term horizon in this time of rising prices.