



## Would that peaking were so transient or distant

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on June 3, 2005 - 1:34am

We are failing or, perhaps, since this is a developing situation, we are not yet beginning to succeed. You might wonder at this opinion, with an AP story on Peak Oil this week that reached the [headlines of papers](#) not only in the US but also in China. And in the columns of the opinion makers of the country, [Kevin Drum](#) has just devoted [five segments](#) to [the topic](#) with the just posted last part [here](#).

So why the gloom? Well back in July of 2003 [Time magazine](#) carried a major article on the fact that the US was running out of both oil and natural gas. As a news item it may have been mentioned around the coffee pot for a couple of days, but then the story quietly melted away. And for the past two years realistically nothing much has changed.

And now we have a little spate of publicity again about the topic. But I am (you will forgive me) an experiment-oriented engineer, geared to seeking tangible results of an event. And I suspect that in two or three days the topic will again fade from the pages of those who guide our opinions, and within a week, apart from when one visits the gas pump, the topic will be largely forgotten for another summer.

It is important that [ProfG & Ianqui, J](#) and others begin the grass roots movement that will help change public behavior and help lower overall demand for fuel. But the press and the public in general are still treating this as a transient topic of interest rather than an absolute event that will, very shortly, change the way we have to live. The Japanese, more dependant on foreign sources of fuel, are recognizing this with their government's move to change sartorial styles and [do away with suits](#) so that air conditioning demands may be lowered. The impact of higher prices is being felt in the poorer countries of the world already, and since prices will inexorably go up, this is only going to get worse.

Very largely we are still protected from these initial wavelets of the coming tide. Price increases are an inconvenience rather than, for most, a devastating blow to a sustainable lifestyle. But by having "covered the peak oil topic" and then left it there is no sense of urgency created, and no pressure on the politicians and bureaucrats to begin serious work on how to help the nation through the transition. The British government has already been funding steps to install windmills as one part of a move to provide 10% sustainable energy into their mix by the end of the decade. In the United States the political will is still to discourage them.

The problem is (and I regret having to take issue with Kevin Drum on this, since he has both recognized the issue and taken kind notice of this site) that it is more important to recognize the coming peak, than the convergence of supply and demand.

The reason is that slight changes in demand brought about by the demand destruction initiated by price can bring supply and demand into convergence. But an imminent peaking and then decline of supply makes that almost impossible without a much more drastic change. And sadly

A delay in the recognition of the problem, and some mandated change in consumption patterns will mean that oil reservoirs will be extracted at higher rates that damage the rock and reduce longer term production. This will also accelerate the rate of decline. Earlier models have discussed depletion rates of 7%. The numbers that are now showing up are up to double that, and that means that the fall will be much more dramatic. It should be noted that so far this year [Russia](#) is not fulfilling the promise of increased production, and several of the OPEC nations (Venezuela, Iran, Indonesia) are in decline already (see the OPEC production table in the blogroll).

Until the day that these concerns appear in national newspapers and web sites on a much more frequent basis, and politicians begin to be asked about them on a regular basis, we have not succeeded. I suspect however that by sometime in the fall the situation will have changed and both the intersection of supply and demand, and the peaking of oil, will both be more evident. And given such a prediction, it will not be long until I will be proved either right or wrong. 'Til then we need to go forth and find more facts, so back to the detective work.

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