

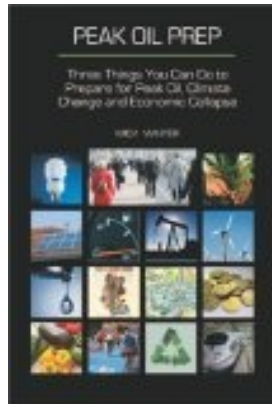


## Book Review: Peak Oil Prep

Posted by [Robert Rapier](#) on December 27, 2006 - 11:29am

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### **Peak Oil Prep** by Mick Winter

For some reason I especially like to read books on Peak Oil, sustainability, and energy issues while traveling. Part of the reason is that traveling always makes me reflective. Part of the reason is that these books are often an ice-breaker that allows me to talk about energy with other travelers. On previous trips I read [Jared Diamond's Collapse](#) and [John Howe's The End of Fossil Energy](#) (reviewed [here](#)). On my latest trip I read [Mick Winter's Peak Oil Prep](#) and [Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth](#). I started reading Peak Oil Prep during my first flight, and while the man sitting across the aisle from me reading the National Enquirer didn't show much interest in what I was reading, the woman sitting next to me reading about Christina Aguilera's confessions in Glamour kept glancing at the book. But unfortunately, she never asked about it and we never struck up a conversation. Opportunity missed.

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First of all, I thought the title - **Peak Oil Prep** - as well as the subtitle - **Three Things You Can Do to Prepare for Peak Oil, Climate Change, and Economic Collapse** - were both misnomers. This is not a book that will merely come in handy when world oil production peaks. Much of the advice in this book will help you save money and adopt a more sustainable lifestyle while lowering your [ecological footprint](#). The subtitle is a misnomer because there were certainly more than "Three Thing You Can Do." That was in fact the theme throughout the book: Three Things to Do (in the kitchen, regarding your health, on education, on community gardens, etc.)

The book contained a lot of information that will be familiar to TOD readers. In fact, there was even a plug for TOD on Page 19. However, each section is chock full of links to additional resources. This was the strength of the book, in my opinion. There were a lot of practical tips, but then the author linked to additional information so you could research a topic to your heart's content. Want to learn to garden using [permaculture](#)? Read the permaculture summary on Page 78, and then follow up with one or more of the ten references on permaculture.

This is not a book to convince people of Peak Oil or of climate change. There is a short section in the beginning that discusses these topics, but those are more appropriate for someone who is already familiar with those issues. This is a book for those who have at least a basic grasp, and who are wondering "What can I do?" And that is answered from "A" (acupressure) to "Z" (zoning). This book is essentially a user's manual for sustainable living.

The book could be repetitive over certain points. While I think it is incredibly valuable advice to tell people to change out their incandescent bulbs for compact fluorescents (and I have done so in the past 3 homes I lived in), I counted no fewer than 7 times this was mentioned in the book. There were also some topics that seemed to be out of place in a peak oil book (e.g. "get more sleep"). But, by and large, the advice is topical, worthwhile, and could probably benefit all of us.

## Taking Notes

I took 3 pages of notes as I read this book on things that were of particular interest to me. In this section I will share some of those issues.

In the early part of the book, the author makes the case that demand is likely to outstrip supply (which I also think is very likely), and that conflict with China appears possible. He also commented that China is outlawing bicycles in some areas, which came a surprise to me. This is the last thing one should do when fossil fuel resources are diminishing.

On Page 18, the author mentions something that I think we frequently forget about - plastics are made from petroleum. We often think of Peak Oil in terms of energy, but we are dependent on petroleum in many other ways.

On Page 20, he mentions a theme that I don't think gets enough attention: Even if you don't believe that Peak Oil is an imminent problem, implementing solutions that reduce your energy usage will lower greenhouse gas emissions. The author calls this a "two-fer", but given that many of these solutions will also save you money it could very well be a "three-fer".

On Page 30, the author discusses the benefits of walking, and then describes 10 keys to walkable communities. As I worked my way down the list, I was struck by how most European villages would be aptly described by these 10 keys, but the typical town in the U.S. would not.

On Page 43, Winter starts to hammer home the "localize" theme, which is a familiar one to TOD readers. This something I have put more effort into this past year, as I spent much more time at farmers' markets.

On Page 61, one of the references caught my eye. It was Dan Chiras' [31 Ways to Create Sustainable Neighborhoods](#). That sounded like one to add to my library.

That is probably enough to give a good flavor of the book. Some of the topics covered through the rest of the book were how to compost, solar ovens, beer making, growing your own coffee, and making your house more energy efficient. One point that really caught my attention was the author's claim that over 50% of the vegetables consumed in Havana (population 2 million) are produced in local gardens. That gives me great hope for the future.

## Addressing a Misconception

There was one oil company misconception that I want to address, because I see it frequently. On Page 17, the author states that no new oil refineries have been built in the U.S. since 1976. He

then suggests that this may be because there's no sense expanding facilities if the feedstock is starting to diminish.

I can tell you that the reason no new refineries have been built is not because oil companies are concerned about Peak Oil. When ExxonMobil tells you that there is plenty of oil, they are not just throwing out a smokescreen. This is what they honestly believe. The vast majority of oil companies, in my opinion, believe that we have adequate supplies of oil for quite some time.

The reason no new refineries have been built is that the permitting process is lengthy. A group in Arizona, Arizona Clean Fuels Yuma LLC, applied for a permit to build a new refinery in 1999. [It was finally granted in 2005](#). So, instead of going through the lengthy permitting process, refiners simply expand their existing refineries. The permitting process for this is significantly simpler.

[The EIA has written extensively on this issue](#). The bottom line on refinery capacity:

Much has been made of the fact that no significant grassroots refinery has been built in the United States in nearly 3 decades other than some small simple refineries. **Yet, U.S. refinery capacity has increased 1.9 million barrels per day over the last 10 years, which is equivalent to the addition of 1 medium-size refinery per year on average**, as refiners attempt to de-bottleneck and make their refineries more efficient, change feedstocks, and add capacity to meet market opportunities. In EIA's latest [Petroleum Supply Annual, Volume 1](#), although the number of refineries stayed the same between January 1, 2003 and January 1, 2004, capacity increased by 137,000 barrels per day, adding, again, the equivalent of another medium-sized refinery!

So, refiners are expanding capacity. This should tell you that, while they may be wrong, they are betting against an imminent peak.

## Conclusion

Overall, this was a solid book that was full of useful resources. This is a good book for anyone trying to live sustainably. For more information, the author hosts 2 Peak Oil websites: [DryDipstick.com](#) and [BeyondPeak.com](#).



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