



## On likely alternatives to conventional oil

Posted by [Yankee](#) on November 28, 2005 - 7:18pm

Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

Tags: [coal liquefaction](#), [environmentalists](#), [peak oil](#) [[list all tags](#)]

David Roberts over at [Gristmill](#) questions whether the immediate reaction to increased awareness of the peak will be the development of renewable energy alternatives.

After receiving a letter to the editor explaining a more likely scenario (see post), [Roberts sums it up for us](#):

Environmentalists seem to have a somewhat naive faith that once the concept of peak oil sinks in, people will move -- as though by the force of tides -- to support renewable, decentralized energy.

But why should that be true? A much more natural, predictable reaction would be to push like mad for more drilling and for more coal gasification. Both more drilling and more coal-to-liquid-fuel production would fit better with our existing infrastructure and practices, however environmentally malign they may be.

Despite their prediction for the most likely path of post-peak fuel production, the authors of the letter, Kai M. A. Chan and Hadi Dowlatabadi of the [Institute for Resources, Environment & Sustainability](#) at the University of British Columbia, hold out some hope:

"Peak oil" represents not a crisis but a cross-roads. One path leads to energy production methods that are more environmentally destructive, but easier because of our existing infrastructure. The other realizes the promise of renewable alternatives and smart growth. When focused, environmental advocacy has been successful in helping society choose the right path. To do so here, we must recognize that "peak oil" brings both threats and opportunities, and will not alone define the right path. We're still living with a six-century fossil fuels legacy prompted by "peak wood" in the UK; it is time to make sure the path chosen now is more sustainable, socially and environmentally.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#).