



## David Suzuki: Renewable energy requires strength of will

By David Suzuki and Faisal Moola  
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Energy underpins everything we do. Human societies have become increasingly complex, requiring ever larger-scale sources of continuous energy. Now, energy fuels not only our activities but our economies as well. If we don't choose our energy sources wisely, we can do more harm than good.

Non-renewable energy sources such as fossil and nuclear fuels are not sustainable and have also taught us that technological advances often come at great cost. These fuels can never be a long-term solution because they will run out. They also create emissions that pollute our air, water, and soil, and contribute to global warming or long-term radioactive-waste problems.

Renewable energy sources will not run out, and they don't cause the same kinds of environmental problems as non-renewable sources. But that doesn't mean we should adopt renewable energy without any forethought. Biofuels can create problems if fuel production comes at the expense of food production. And wind power, if not properly planned and sited, can harm birds and bats (although Danish studies of 10,000 bird kills revealed that almost all died in collisions with buildings, cars, and wires; only 10 were killed by windmills).

Alternative energy sources are absolutely necessary. Global warming will kill birds and bats, as well as other species, in much greater numbers than wind power. We just need good planning to ensure that our energy production is balanced with ecological concerns. And we need to believe in our ability to develop solutions.

During three decades of producing the TV program *The Nature of Things*, we've often encountered difficulties while filming in exotic locations. Back when we worked with film, we always took a lighting person with us. I dreaded working with one lighting guy because whenever he was faced with a demanding challenge, he'd respond, "It can't be done." We'd have to cajole him until we accomplished the task, but it drained the crew's morale and wore us down.

Another lighting person would respond, "Well, this is a tough one, but let's give it a try." I can't remember ever giving up because it really was impossible.

The mental attitude that underlies the way we approach any challenge is a huge part of how well we deal with it, and it applies at national and global levels as well. For more

than 20 years, leading scientists have warned us that the dangers of runaway global warming are so great that we cannot continue along the same path. Yet the response (usually led by the fossil-fuel industry) has been “It’s junk science” or “It’s too expensive; it’ll destroy the economy,” or “It’s impossible to meet the reduction targets.” These kinds of reactions demoralize or paralyze society.

Compare those comments on the challenge of climate change with the American response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor or the Soviet Union’s launch of Sputnik 1. These events galvanized the nation into action. There was no outrage over the scale of effort needed or the economic burden. There was a sense of solidarity of purpose, to win the war or to beat the Russians to the moon. Throwing everything at winning led to all kinds of unexpected bonuses: the American economy blazed out of the Depression, while the race to the moon resulted in the Internet, 24-hour-a-day news channels, GPS, and cell phones. Making a commitment to resolve a serious crisis generates opportunities and creates jobs.

Already, renewable energy technologies are creating employment and giving economies a boost around the world. Countries like Denmark and Germany started shifting to renewable energy sources after the OPEC oil embargo in the 1970s. Today, Denmark obtains 20 percent of its energy from wind power and is aiming at 50 percent by 2020. Germany obtains 14 percent of its energy from wind, is the major exporter of wind technology, and has created more than 82,000 jobs in the wind sector, and more than 200,000 total renewable-energy jobs. Wind power has become the country’s fastest-growing job creator over the past three decades.

Even the U.S. Energy Department has concluded that wind power could become the source of one fifth of that nation’s power by 2030, and other studies have shown that wind, solar, and biofuel energy could create five million U.S. jobs by 2030.

The problem with making major inroads on the climate challenge is not a lack of solutions; it is a lack of will. As we saw with our lighting technicians, our attitude toward what confronts us will have a huge impact on how we achieve results.

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