

NATURAL GAS IN FUTURE

In recent years, more than a few people have come to the conclusion that it's "...decidedly uncool to be an energy hog. Or, more to the point, [that it's] cool to be energy efficient. Only the most unconscious or thick-skinned of us still [ride] around in anything resembling a Humvee" (Tertzakian 221). As proof, we need only turn to the year 2008, when \$4 (U.S.) gallons of gasoline caused American SUV sales to plummet 32.8% in the first quarter alone, with CNN headlines suggesting that the entire species of SUVs was fast approaching the 'endangered' list of American vehicles (Lawrence). Tempers flared as motorists watched prices skyrocket at service stations across the continent, with many folks left searching for alternative (NB: less expensive) means of commuting. At the time, fingers were immediately pointed at petroleum — the infamously limited, ever-dwindling, disappear-before-you-know-it supply of petroleum. But when people say 'petroleum,' many of us think of oil and oil alone. Petroleum itself, however, is comprised of both oil and natural gas *together*.

With oil's future outlook seeming decidedly unpromising, the pressure is on to find clean alternatives that are capable of acting as energy bridges or long-term solutions. But not so fast.

Before we jump the petroleum ship entirely, there appears to be merit in at least *investigating* the role that natural gas could play as we shuttle toward an oil-less era. It's a fuel that's come a long way. This short but explosive (OK, no combustion jokes) history on natural gas will, with any hope, give you an idea of what I mean.

If we take a step back from the problem, then, "...here is what we appear to have: a world that is universally threatened by climate change caused by greenhouse gases appears to have a global oversupply of its cleanest and lowest-carbon fossil fuel" (Smead "Abundance" 32). So, while it *would* be possible for natural gas to serve as a 'bridge fuel' that could tide us over until alternatives are capable of making a bigger dent in market share, it would ultimately require the natural gas industry to spend "tens of billions of dollars to ramp up production, build a lot of new delivery capacity, and so on, [all] with the firm understanding that..." natural gas is only a temporary part of our plans (Smead, "Competitor" 28). For this reason, there seems to be great potential in embracing a synergistic, long-term relationship between natural gas and renewable energy sources. After all, it possesses a whole lot more in common with emerging technologies than it does with traditional resource industries such as coal and oil; it's high in value, clean, produces comparatively low carbon emissions and, more importantly, the footprint of its production, once a well is drilled and in place, is extremely minor (Smead, "Competitor" 29).

The challenge will be in determining what kind of role it ought to play in conjunction with new alternatives. Will we be able, in the long run, to view it as part of the *new* world of energy resources, and no longer a part of the old?

Source: <http://www.sassweb.ca/3bb3/volume1-0/natural-gas/natural-gas-past-present-and-future>