



Analyst urges cure for oil-import addiction

By **TED GRIGGS**

Advocate business writer

The United States can easily end its addiction to imported oil by moving to automobiles that run on gasoline and alcohol or that can use a mixture of electricity and gasoline for power, a security and energy analyst said Wednesday.

"If we want to reduce our oil dependence, dependence on foreign oil, then we have to focus on the transportation sector," said Anne Korin, director of policy and strategic planning for the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security.

Korin was one of the speakers at the LSU Energy Center's Alternative Energy Conference. The two-day conference ends today. About 70 people attended the first day.

Two-thirds of the country's oil is used for transportation, mainly for gasoline and diesel, Korin said.

In two to three decades, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, will control 90 percent of the world's oil reserves, Korin said. Most of the world's oil is in countries where radical Islam is on the rise, countries that, as President Bush put it, don't particularly like us.

"We do nothing, we're in a very big jam down the line," Korin said.

Korin cited a number of reasons the U.S. must change its transportation fuel choice.

n The oil supply is vulnerable.

Attacks against oil facilities are increasing worldwide, Korin said. Terrorists have made more than 200 attacks against pipelines in Iraq, as well as other oil facilities.

n Tankers are very vulnerable, Korin said. The ships have to travel through narrow straits in countries where radical Islam is on the rise and terrorists freely operate.

Moving to liquefied natural gas, an imported resource in essentially a similarly unstable area, also transported by tankers, won't solve the problem,

Korin said.

n The countries funding terrorists get most of their money from energy exports.

"We are fighting a war against terrorism, and to put it very bluntly, we are paying for both sides of the war," Korin said.

n The rise of developing countries is putting more pressure on oil supplies and increasing the cost of energy.

"China and India together are a third of humanity, and they don't want to ride bicycles anymore," Korin said. The most-popular automobile in China is a sport utility vehicle.

China's oil consumption increased between 30 percent and 40 percent last year, Korin said. In order to secure their oil supplies, China and India are using the same tactics as the United States: diplomatic and military measures, including sales of weapons.

U.S. sanctions against Iran for its nuclear program have no teeth because China recently signed a huge energy deal with Iran, Korin said.

The United States needs a different strategy: shifting from imported oil to domestic energy resources, Korin said.

America has 25 percent of the world's coal, which makes us the Saudi Arabia of coal, she said. America also has lots of biomass, or agricultural and municipal waste; like coal, biomass can be turned into methanol, the same fuel used in Indy race cars.

America can alter its transportation fuels using existing technology, with little investment required, Korin said.

Flexible fuel vehicles can burn alcohol or gasoline or a mixture of both, Korin said. It would cost manufacturers less than \$100 more to make vehicles capable of burning both fuels.

The cost to retrofit an existing gasoline pump to handle methanol is around \$20,000, Korin said. The government can offer incentives to gas stations to make the changes.

The United States has plentiful supplies of solar, nuclear and wind power, she said. The way to get those energy sources into cars is electricity, through hybrid vehicles, which run on gasoline and battery power.

Hybrids increase gas consumption efficiency by 30 percent to 40 percent, Korin said.

Another option is "plug-in" hybrids. In addition to generating electricity from

the engine and braking, these cars can be plugged into a standard electric outlet.

Plug-in hybrids can travel up to 100 miles for each gallon of gas, Korin said. Half the cars in the country are driven 20 miles a day or less; a plug-in with a 20-mile range battery could reduce fuel consumption by 85 percent.

If the two technologies are put into flexible fuel/plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, fuel economy could reach 500 miles per gallon of gasoline.

By 2025, if all cars are hybrids and half are plug-ins, U.S. oil imports would drop by 8 million barrels per day, Korin said. The United States now imports 10 million barrels per day, and imports are expected to double by 2025.

However, if all the cars on the road were also flexible-fuel vehicles, U.S. oil imports would drop by 12 million barrels per day, Korin said.

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