



Energy Myths and Realities: Bringing Science to the Energy Policy Debate

By Vaclav Smil

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There are many misconceptions about the future of global energy often presented as fact by the media, politicians, business leaders, activists, and even scientists_wasting time and money and hampering the development of progressive energy policies. Energy Myths and Realities: Bringing Science to the Energy Policy Debate debunks the most common fallacies to make way for a constructive, scientific approach to the global energy challenge. When will the world run out of oil? Should nuclear energy be adopted on a larger scale? Are ethanol and wind power viable sources of energy for the future? Vaclav Smil advises the public to be wary of exaggerated claims and impossible promises. The global energy transition will be prolonged and expensive_and hinges on the development of an extensive new infrastructure. Established technologies and traditional energy sources are persistent and adaptable enough to see the world through that transition. Energy Myths and Realities brings a scientific perspective to an issue often dominated by groundless assertions, unfounded claims, and uncritical thinking. Before we can create sound energy policies for the future, we must renounce the popular myths that cloud our judgment and impede true progress.

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Editorial Review

Review

Numerous energy-related issues have increased public discussions to the point that energy has become a permanent part of national policy concerns and/or debates.... In his well-researched book, Smil (Univ. of Manitoba, Canada), author of numerous energy-related works, examines the scientific authenticity of information available to the public based on "first principles, basic engineering realities, and simple but revealing quantification" and warns of promoting any simplistic solutions to deep worldwide dependence on fossil fuels. He concludes with an interesting chapter titled "The Pace of Energy Transition," arguing that it takes more than money and good wishes to replace an existing infrastructure. Smil's suggestion to reduce energy consumption via increasing energy efficiency in all sectors is hard to challenge. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through professionals; general readers. (*CHOICE*)

The book provides the insights of a careful, experienced observer into the arrant nonsense that is routinely presented in calls for radical changes in energy consumption practices....A readable, sensible survey of why a massive energy transformation is problematic. The book does a good job of relaying the academic literature on new energy technologies. It is a healthy corrective to the special pleading that has marred the U.S. discussion of energy. (*Regulation Magazine*)

America needs energy, it's how to get which is the massive debate. *Energy Myths and Realities: Bringing Science to the Energy Policy Debate* is a realistic approach to the energy crisis that encourages progress but at the same time realizes there is no silver bullet solution to America's energy issues. With thoughtful research, Vaclav Smil looks at history and draws a map to where we are now and the many solutions that sit before us. *Energy Myths and Realities* is a core addition to any environmental and political studies collection. (*Wisconsin Bookwatch*)

Prof. Smil is an expert on the history of technological innovation. . . . Prof. Smil methodically sets out to show that the facts do not support either the romantics, who think we'll be saved by wind turbines, or the techno-optimists, who think that electric cars are right around the corner. (*The Globe and Mail*)

Smil (environment and environmental geography, U. of Manitoba, Canada) debunks myths and misconceptions about energy to provide a more realistic understanding of energy affairs and introduce skeptical perspectives of future energy options. The myths relate to electric cars; nuclear electricity; soft energy; peak oil and the consequences of oil depletion; carbon dioxide sequestration; liquid fuels from plants, including ethanol from corn; wind power; and the rapid pace of energy transitions. (*Booknews*)

Mandatory reading for U.S. policymakers. (*National Review*)

Energy is both a technical topic and a political one; all too often, the political claims and assertions get far more play than sober technical reality. In *Energy Myths and Realities*, Vaclav Smil does a brilliant job of examining the crazy quilt of claims and assertions about energy. With great wit and simple, clear arguments, he shows that most of the wild claims we hear-in all directions-have no basis in reality. (Nathan Myhrvold, James Beard Award-winning coauthor of *Modernist Cuisine: The Art and Science of Cooking* and *Modernist Cuisine at Home*, and author of *The Photography of Modernist Cuisine*)

Vaclav Smil is a giant among energy scientists and historians. In this book, he explains why fossil fuels

remain dominant, why it is so hard to scale up wind and solar technologies, and why nuclear power, despite having been over-hyped in the past, is one of our best hopes for meeting future energy needs and dealing with global warming. (Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, co-founders of Breakthrough Institute)

Investment opportunities into new energy sources and related conversion techniques are, at times, molded by preconceived ideas that can sometimes lead to excessively positive and unjustifiably enthusiastic expectations. By criticizing the assorted myths and misconceptions surrounding energy innovations, Vaclav Smil provides readers with refreshing insights which are often missing in today's energy policy debates. (Philippe Rohner, Senior Investment Manager, Pictet Asset Management)

Vaclav Smil is a master thinker about the master resource of energy. A multidisciplinary, Smil combines basic economics, technological understanding, and historical insight to skewer false energy visions. Energy reality, he reminds us, is determined by the free marketplace, not by words or wishes. (Robert Bradley, founder and CEO, Institute for Energy Research)

I recommend this book to everyone who spends time working on energy issues – not to cheer them up but to help them have a stronger framework for evaluating energy promises. (Bill Gates, thegatesnotes.com)

About the Author

Vaclav Smil is Distinguished Professor of Environment and Environmental Geography at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anne Bonk:

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