

State of Arizona Bureau of Geology and Mineral Technology

Geological Survey Branch Geothermal Group

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EDITORIAL

Public Relations

Most people in Arizona do not know about geothermal energy nor are they aware of the state's tremendous potential for this valuable resource. In this instance public relations involves the selling of an idea and a commodity. In order to sell the commodity, the idea of geothermal energy use must be sold first.

The residents of the State of Arizona, receiving over 300 cloudless days per year, have long been aware of the solar energy potential. The citizenry are enthusiastic about it; the politicians and environmental preservation groups extol its values as THE alternate energy resource for the state. Regretably, because of technology problems, solar energy use, now and in the foreseeable short term future, will be marginal from an economic standpoint. Solar collection cells are at best big, cumbersome, expensive and must be kept very clean to be reasonably efficient. Solar energy storage systems for use at night; or on cloudy, rainy days are primitive and again rather cumbersome. But I'm not telling you anything you don't already know nor am I suggesting abandonment of solar energy research and use. Far from it; in the future we will need all the solar energy resources we can economically develop.

However, the technology for the economic development of geothermal energy is here and now. Should Congress, next year, pass the omnibus bill of geothermal energy legislation being proposed by the Interagency Geothermal Coordinating Council, with tax incentives, depletion allowances, etc. geothermal energy will be a highly competitive, viable alternate energy source. The utility and energy companies are well aware of geothermal energy's tremendous potential for the generation of electricity so that phase of the commodity selling will require minimal effort. The general public, however, must still be educated, especially in the use of low to moderate temperature (30°-150°C) geothermal resources.

I personally feel that the Department of Energy, Division of Geothermal Energy should take the lead in this education process. A frank accurate presentation of the geothermal resource capability could be generated through the national labs, engineering contractors, state agencies and universities currently under contract to DOE/DGE. An expensive mass media saturation campaign is not warranted, the continually rising cost of energy will keep the general public very interested in inexpensive alternate energy sources. Public speaking,




pamphlets, posters, bumper stickers, short slide shows and films as well as good press coverage should be all that's necessary to get the message across.

At present our group tries, on a most limited scale, to fulfill this function. We are, however, rather stuffy, formal geologists and technicians more used to conversing with other stuffy, formal geologists and technicians than the general public. It is a spare time, somewhat unwanted, awkward endeavor performed out of necessity by our group. We, as professionals, are painfully aware that the public relations functions should be performed by a professional public relations person working in conjunction with our group. In this manner, the public relations person could take our dry scientific rhetoric, jazz it up, sugar coat it and make it quite palatable for consumption by the general public.

There are ten states in the IOW Rocky Mountain/Basin and Range region. One or two professional PR people with a secretary, assigned to and working in each of the ten states could probably work wonders in making the general public aware of geothermal energy potential. It might be more efficient and economic to centrally locate a small staff and work several states from one office. The money available and type of program desired will dictate the logistics of the actual program.

Geothermal energy will be developed and used. How fast geothermal energy will be developed and used depends in large measure upon how well we get our message across to the general public.


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