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New Orleans Disaster Tip of Looming Energy Iceberg

The horrific tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and the storm's aftereffects on oil prices and the economy in general offer up a small-scale vision of the even bigger energy crisis looming in the future if we fail to develop sustainable alternative energy sources, officials of Cleanpeace.org charged today.

"The New Orleans disaster underscores the fragility of the U.S. energy system, because of its utter dependence on oil," said Bill Garrett, president and co-founder of the non-profit educational and advocacy group, which supports replacement of depletable fossil and radioactive nuclear energy with undepletable energy from wind, wave action, solar, and biomass wastes.

"Fuel prices have risen dramatically as a result of our economy's inability to sustain even a partial loss of petroleum supplies from a single U.S. port," he continued. "Imagine the chaos if oil supplies were permanently reduced throughout the world.

"We have an urgent responsibility to provide energy security with more plentiful energy," said Cleanpeace.org Chairman and co-founder Roy E. McAlister, an engineer, scientist, author and world authority on energy and materials science. "Oil powers the world's economy. Indeed, it's the foundation of our prosperity. "Some 6.4 billion people depend on petroleum products for their lives and livelihoods. Besides gasoline, diesel fuel, and lubricants, an amazing array of chemicals, plastics, fertilizers, and even medicines are all based on petroleum.

But, he warned, "the earth's limited fossil oil resource is being burned at an alarming rate, and geopolitics threatens to reduce the supply of oil to the U.S. even further."

"We consume six barrels of oil for each new barrel discovered," said McAlister. "We have already reached peak oil—the point at which demand exceeds production capacity. The oil industry has responded by replacing older, spent oil fields with smaller, less productive ones, but these are limited in capacity and cannot provide oil at the rate demanded to power the world economy.

"What's even more alarming is the possible effect of political conflicts on oil supplies," he said, noting that "OPEC politicians struggle with despots over control of 61 percent of all existing oil resources, as compared to the United States, with less than 3 percent. If OPEC leaders turn off these oil spigots, or if they lose power and their successors choose to do so, inadequate oil

supplies will plunge the U.S. economy into chaos, conflict and suffering far worse than the horrors we've seen in New Orleans."

"The time for us, as a society, to develop better sources of fuel—sustainable sources—is now," said McAlister. "It is a moral imperative. The technology exists and the dangers are clear, but once again our leaders have chosen the wrong path and support a doomed industry—oil—and a toxic one—radioactive nuclear energy—with subsidies that should be going to develop permanent clean energy solutions," he said.

Congress' recent passage of the Energy Bill, with its multibillion dollar subsidies for oil and radioactive nuclear power, is a sorry example of the nation's short-sighted reliance on yesterday's technology and depletable resources, noted Garret.

"This new law is a giant step back to an era when America's oil gushed from the ground and advocates of radioactive nuclear energy promised us—erroneously—clean energy too cheap to meter. But the new energy law comes at a time when nature can no longer provide the fossil oil needed to power continued prosperity, and the cost and dangers of radioactive energy are enormous and unfeasible," he said.

"The Energy Bill should have created a crash program to replace petroleum-based fuels with energy from America's abundant domestic, undepletable energy resources—solar, wind, waves, falling water, and biomass wastes," McAlister noted.

He noted that each day more solar energy comes to the Earth than the energy contained in all the oil that ever existed, and nature delivers vast amounts of this energy in waves, wind, and sunlight on scorched deserts where it can be harnessed to power sustainable prosperity without pollution.

"Nature has issued a challenge. It's up to us to see the energy situation clearly and take urgent action to avert a crisis greater than what we've suffered in New Orleans.," Garrett said.

Cleanpeace.org is a not-for-profit organization. Its mission is to promote the development of alternative energy sources such as wind, waves, solar and biomass, and to educate the public on the relationships between energy policy and world peace, prosperity, global warming and pollution. It is based in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Mesa, Arizona, with supporters throughout the U.S. and the world. For more information, visit the group's website at www.cleanpeace.org

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MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES: Cleanpeace spokesmen are available for print and electronic interviews. In addition, Cleanpeace has background material on sustainable energy resources, as well as depletable energy sources and the politics of energy. Call Bill Garrett at (203) 372-6166 or Roy McAlister at (602) 328-4238 or email bill.cleanpeace@gmail.com or roy.cleanpeace@gmail.com for assistance.