

# Nichols Hills

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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## News

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The 2009 Beaux Arts Debutantes

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# SUSTAINABILITY & ENERGY

By Mary Ellen Ternes

In last month's column we addressed sustainability – making smart choices to save resources, and by saving resources, saving money. One of the hottest sustainability areas is energy, a subject that, in Oklahoma, may be considered controversial.

We've all heard or read about "sustainable energy," like wind and solar, which are recognized as sustainable because, unlike fossil fuels, they rely on sun that will shine and wind that will blow, if not every single moment (such as night time and still summer days), at least daily and perpetually. The goal of developing these other forms of energy has been discussed as two-fold: energy security and greenhouse gas avoidance. And, like it or not, the U.S. Congress is debating proposed legislation that would put in place greenhouse gas emission limits and incentives to use other forms of energy and enhance energy efficiency.

It's not all controversial, however; the legislation would also generally prevent greenhouse gas emissions from being permitted by the U.S. EPA under the federal Clean Air Act. This would be particularly helpful in avoiding some potentially messy results (please, no air permits for green-

house gas emissions). Soon, Oklahomans may be living with a greenhouse gas limited scenario similar to that adopted by other countries.

As residents of Oklahoma, what could this federal energy legislation mean to us? Well, since most of the manmade greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. come from coal-fired power plants (according to EPA's calculations), then federal greenhouse gas emissions limits will provide a general incentive to emit less by wasting less power and producing only the power we really need (or are willing to pay for). This means that energy prices will probably be higher, and to save money, we'll probably try to save energy. Thus, a home's energy efficiency may soon mean more than the number of bathrooms or the size of its kitchen or closets.

The power company may give us "smart meters" to let us know when the power plant's electricity production is being completely used (and thus, when it's expensive), or when there is energy to spare (and when it's cheaper). We may finally get around to install-

ing proper insulation and completely switching over to compact fluorescent bulbs. We might roll up our sleeves and line dry our clothes or choose “energy star” appliances.

After a hail storm, we may decide to install a new “cool” roof rather than a conventional dark asphaltic roof that absorbs heat, causing us to turn on our air conditioning more often than necessary.

Because moving and treating water uses lots of energy, our water bills could be higher, motivating us to choose more efficient shower heads and toilets, recycle water where we can and quit overwatering our lawns.

Our cars will probably get better gas mileage (EPA just proposed new average fuel economy standards), but because most transportation generates greenhouse gas emissions at some point in the system, transportation will probably become more expensive and transportation options more limited. Thus, we may choose to buy more locally grown and manufactured goods. Our employers may ask us to work from home sometimes,



and we may travel for work less while we participate in more webinars and virtual meetings.

When we go to the office, we may find that our City has created bike lanes to downtown from residential areas so that we can bike to work. Our employers may ask us to turn off our computers at night rather than letting them “sleep” all night, we may see more efficient lighting and other energy use

at the office, and we might start seeing “urban turbines” on our downtown office buildings generating electricity.

How does all of that sound? We might survive. ■

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