

# Energy-Environment Misinformation: The U.N. Needs Help

*Larry Good  
Good Engineering*

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting Toronto, a clean, relaxing city. Among its attractions was the BCE Place Galleria, a glass-roof mall enclosing the lower levels of an entire street, including a charming historic building. The resulting space was comfortable, inviting and architecturally fascinating. The mixed-use technical creation allowed Canadians and tourists alike to enjoy sidewalk cafes even in the driving rain and wind we watched through the walls of our engineered womb.

The United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC) had set up a display to solicit donations in the middle of this mall. 135 winning entries from the United Nations Environment Programme's photography contest depicted situations of environmental beauty and catastrophe around the globe. Three photos were chosen for the theme poster to convey, without captions or explanation, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." Dolphins frolicking with a Homo sapiens were chosen to represent "the Good." No problem.

"The Ugly" was a puzzle to viewers. Was it an owl, a butterfly, a leaf arrangement? Upon inquiring, I was told, "I'm not sure what it is, but it sure is ugly!"

"The Bad" caused me a problem. The photograph showed two hyperbolic cooling towers at a distance, silhouetted by the faint light of dawn. Naturally, with the ambient night air at the dew point, huge plumes of condensed moisture rose far into the peaceful morning sky from the towers.

"What is this picture?" I asked.

"Well, that's environmental damage," came the reply.

UNAC's stated purposes are "to study international problems... to foster mutual understanding..." and "to furnish information..." Local advocates seek to "develop environmental fact sheets." Hoping the

spokesman collecting money might be on the education committee, I probed further. "Just what is the damage this picture is trying to show?"

My friend was getting irritated by my lack of insight. "Well, whenever I see stacks spewing this much pollution," he exclaimed unambiguously, "I would say we have a serious environmental problem! Wouldn't you?"

This was not Greenpeace or the Symbianese Liberation Army I was talking to. These pictures came from the United Nations! I expected more. Later it was revealed that the scene was of an American nuclear power plant. I understand the opposition of some to nuclear energy. Their position is clear. But pollution spewing from nuclear smoke stacks? Come on! Is this what they are teaching school children?

I wanted to ask the spokesman why he chose to sit inside this beautiful comfort zone if those filthy old "stacks" supplying his light and ventilation were such a horror. Why didn't he take his campaign out in the rain? But I held my tongue (and my wallet) and thanked him for his patience.

My reactions are not meant to condemn Canadians. As a nation, they are the best. I could have seen this UN photo exhibition replicated in any member country. I've seen worse propaganda in my own community. Nor do I wish to eliminate the UN. The nations of the world desperately need to unite in peace and protect the environment. Everyone should support the UN.

What the UN seems to need, however, is a little help, the kind energy engineers can offer. Regarding energy systems, we would gladly explain to the photographers what their film has recorded. If invited, we would love to prevent misinformation to school children.

Do I think we should live well at the expense of the environment? Not at all! Do we want to reduce our standard of living? Not at all! Can we have it both ways? I think so. Energy management professionals make their livings designing and implementing the projects that solve the problems. There is nothing we would rather do.

This is our calling.

Ask us.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Larry Good, CEM**, is a former president of the National Capital Chapter of the Association of Energy Engineers. He represents AEE on the Interagency Renewable Energy Working Group, convened by the

Federal Energy Management Program per Executive Order 12902, to increase the use of renewables in federal facilities. He also represents AEE on the U.S. National Team of the International Energy Agency's Centre for the Analysis & Dissemination of Demonstrated Energy Technologies (CADDET).

Larry is co-author with AEE member Dan Williams, of the *Guide to the Energy Policy Act of 1992*, the only book published to date which is a systematic interpretation of the details of the Act. As a private consultant, he devotes his efforts, both professional and volunteer, to implementing EPAct, which calls for dramatic federal energy efficiency improvements and the export of American energy technologies. He provides technical support to EPA in its search for better energy technologies to upgrade its own facilities. Abroad, he seeks ways to help emerging nations in Eastern Europe and Latin America develop efficiently and sustainably.

Earlier, Larry managed maintenance in NASA testing labs. He holds degrees in engineering and foreign careers from Lehigh University.