



## Off the Grid in a Liquid Fuel Crisis?

Posted by [Glenn](#) on November 16, 2007 - 3:00pm in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

Tags: [back to the land](#), [electricity](#), [off the grid](#), [original](#), [self sufficiency](#) [[list all tags](#)]

*Another guest post from Hans Noeldner of Oregon, Wisconsin, who does not believe in the Dream Home ideal as portrayed in "Zero House From the Future is Totally Green, Off-Grid" especially considering the [crisis is more in liquid fuels than electricity](#).*

The ideal of getting “off the grid” – that is, living independently of the electrical power grid – has been popular for a long time, dating to the ‘60’s if not sooner. Remember the Whole Earth Catalog, communes, Woodstock, and rejection of corporate excesses?

Many people tried living “off the grid” over the years, but almost no one has stuck with the program. Small windmills, solar panels, biogas-driven generators, and battery storage arrays often proved unreliable, and maintenance was a lot of work! Although millions of us moved “back to the land” in search of greater self-sufficiency, we dropped the self-sufficiency part long ago, and actually became far more dependent on nonrenewable resources – oil in particular - than ever before.

With fossil fuel prices surging once more, the ideal of “getting off the grid” is back. The popular focus again is on personal independence and self-reliance – building our own house out in the country on a good-sized chunk of land, with our own disconnected energy systems.

Hold on!

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Getting “off the grid” this way is as dumb as it was thirty-five years ago, and for the same reason. Why? TRANSPORTATION! Hippies and yuppies love mobility far more than we hate oil companies and superhighways and the parking lots that pave Paradise; we have racked up far, far more miles per capita than any prior generation. Along the way we have become critically dependent on a vast, enormously expensive grid of publicly funded highways. If any “grid” is strangling our nation, it is the grid of low-density sprawl that leaves us 99.9% dependent on oil, automobiles, and millions of life-suffocating acres of pavement.

Yes, there are smart ways to get “off the grid” – starting with getting OURSELVES off the highways more often! That means walking, bicycling, and using public transit – modes that are incompatible with living in an isolated house on a big chunk of land. So getting “off the grid” of highways will entail getting “on the grid” of streets! OK, we’ve known for a while that God is not making the Earth any bigger, so let’s get used to living closer together.

While reducing our demand for electricity doesn’t literally get us “off the grid”, it will make the grid a lot more reliable. Why? With all our new gadgets and far larger houses and coal-fired Lava Lamps, we-the-people are straining capacity. But we don’t want huge new power plants or transmission lines or substations anywhere near us, which means we don’t want them anywhere.

Trimming our consumption to a level that the existing grid can handle is a no-brainer.

And in compact communities, municipal-level cogeneration is an idea whose time has come. Less dependence on distant electrical plants would greatly reduce the likelihood of region-wide power failures. Cogeneration – burning fuel to produce electricity AND heat for local use – is about twice as efficient as burning fuel for electrical generation alone. District heating with cogeneration works great on college campuses and in many European communities. It can work here too - if we build together rather than building alone.



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