

[LETTERS]



I PREFER PAPER

I have elected to continue receiving *Engineering Dimensions* by mail despite the environmental issues (I am a tree hugger) and the financial costs (I am fiscally tight). Like too many self-governed and ungoverned NGOs and government agencies, there appears to be no fiscal responsibility to the payer, be they taxpayer or member. Here I am thinking of Ornge and eHealth, among others. I include PEO in this group. PEO is concerned about reducing costs where it concerns communication to members but appears to have no compunction about spending money on itself. Here I am thinking about the tens, if not hundreds, of thousands spent on legal costs for two recent incidents.

One appeared to involve the hurt feelings of the chief elections officer by engineer "A." This required 18 pages of text in Gazette. The other involved some council member resigning and another councillor disagreeing. I have yet to wrap my head around this one. Please, would the participants give their heads a serious shake? I am also thinking about our "Crystal Palace," the building at 40 Sheppard Avenue West. I have not visited it yet but I imagine mahogany wood paneling and plush carpets throughout, massive teak desks, desk-side tea service, a smoking room with "old boy" club chairs, and on and on and on. We obviously need a name for our "Crystal Palace." PEO Palace is too mundane. Any suggestions?

So, if PEO can, in my opinion, waste millions, then I want a few dollars wasted on me. I will reduce my environmental footprint elsewhere in contrition.

David Moffat, P.Eng., Toronto, ON

A SKEPTIC'S VIEW

It was with considerable interest that I read the article on climate change risk in the January/February 2013 issue of *Engineering Dimensions* ("Shedding new light on the nature and inevitability of risk," p. 42). As a chemical engineer who has had a mixed career in industry and academe, I became profoundly interested in the issue of climate some 40 years ago. I remember well the new Ice Age worries in the '70s and have closely followed the evolution of the current climate hysteria of late. The climate is changing; it has been changing ever since the Earth acquired an atmosphere and will continue to do so. There have been periods where temperatures have risen and periods where they have fallen. Currently, there has been no significant change in global temperature for the past 17 years, so if the permafrost is melting it is most likely natural causes.

Sea levels are not rising and it is foolish to attempt to relate extreme weather to climate change—there simply is no connection. There was an excellent article by Lawrence Solomon in the *National Post* on January 30 where he points out some of the current facts and thoughts on this issue. One interesting point is his reference to Abdussamatov's theories that the Earth may very likely be in for a 40-year-long, mini Ice Age akin to what occurred during a similar solar period called the Maunder Minimum.

It is ridiculous to call carbon dioxide a pollutant. Without CO₂, there would be no photosynthesis, animals or people. My main concerns, in addition to the enormous amount of misinformation in the media, are some of the moves that governments have made in an attempt to cope with this alleged catastrophe which, according to Prince Charles, means we only have 99 months to deal with it.

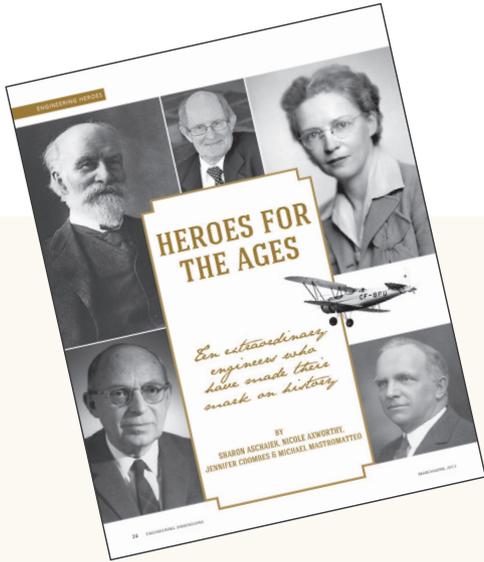
Windmills and solar cells are essentially a scam—they all require standby thermal power plants kept in an extremely inefficient spinning mode for the frequent time when the wind doesn't blow or it is night time. James Lovelock, the scientist of the Gaia hypothesis, calls windmills similar to the stone statues on Easter Island, a memorial to a failed idea.

The other ridiculous idea is corn-based ethanol as a motor fuel. This process produces more CO₂ than it saves and results in an inferior fuel. I don't hear much about where the electricity to charge all these lithium batteries in the electric cars comes from. Most likely it originates from a fossil fuel plant.

What I see as a likely future is a major shift to methane, since it appears as if shale gas reserves are simply enormous. The other little understood issue is that there is another enormous supply of methane tied up as methane hydrate, which surpasses all the known shale gas reserves. A recent demonstration has been successful in recovering methane from hydrates.

Engineering Dimensions, I presume, should represent an engineering perspective of issues, such as climate change. I submit my admittedly skeptic's view of the current situation.

Barrie Jackson, P.Eng., Perth, ON



THEY WERE HEROES

I have just finished reading *Engineering Dimensions'* March/April 2013 issue, particularly the article "Heroes for the Ages" (p. 24).

I graduated from the University of Toronto in mechanical engineering in 1969 and was privileged to have been there when James Ham, P.Eng., was the dean of applied science and engineering. I met him on more than one occasion. I also took first-year electrical engineering in 1965 from a lady professor in the old SPS building (the year before it was taken down).

Also, I took third-year fluid mechanics (1968) from professor G. Ross Lord, P.Eng. And yes, I was living in Etobicoke with my parents when Toronto was hit by Hurricane Hazel in 1954 (my father went out with other civil defense volunteers to help rescue less fortunate Torontonians).

So yes, I can certainly understand how these two gentlemen were included. Perhaps you could sift through all the future correspondence on this article and perhaps report on 10 or more heroes as decided by people sending in their own ideas.

Alan Tyrrell, P.Eng., Elora, ON

TIME TO STANDARDIZE WITH METRIC

I was at the East Central Region Congress meeting at our new PEO headquarters at 40 Sheppard Avenue West on March 9. Our new place looks nice. While we did spend a lot of money, it does show and it is good if the headquarters of PEO is a fine showcase of Canadian engineering at work.

I noticed a couple of things that surprised me. In the washroom, the flushing valves have a nice heavy stainless steel plaque that says something like this: "This valve saves thousands of gallons of water each year." When we went back to the meeting room, I then noticed that the room temperature transmitter displayed temperature in degrees Fahrenheit. What I am wondering is: Should we not use metric units to appear to be Canadian and up to date? In other words, the plaque should say litres not gallons and the temperature should be in Celsius not Fahrenheit.

I suspect both of these items came from the US, or Usonia, as Frank Lloyd Wright liked to call it. They are probably standard items in the US because it, along with Myanmar (formerly Burma), is the only country on the planet that is not using metric units. We should, I think, look Canadian in our engineering work, especially in our own head office. Of course, the minute you see gallons you have to ask, Is it imperial gallons or US gallons? This is another good example of why we should not use imperial units because they are not really a system but a confusing collection of convoluted units. We should try to make it look Canadian. I like to think that someday the US will be metric but I am not holding my breath. The use of metric allows us to trade with the whole world.

John Bailes, P.Eng., secretary, East Toronto Chapter, PEO

CORRECTION

In our March/April 2013 issue, we incorrectly identified the riding of MP Corneliu Chisu, P.Eng., as Pickering-Scarborough. It is, in fact, Pickering-Scarborough East.

Letters to the editor are welcomed, but should be kept to no more than 500 words, and are subject to editing for length, clarity and style. Publication is at the editor's discretion; unsigned letters will not be published. The ideas expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions and policies of the association, nor does the association assume responsibility for the opinions expressed. Emailed letters should be sent with "Letter to the editor" in the subject line. All letters pertaining to a current PEO issue are also forwarded to the appropriate committee for information. Address letters to jcoombes@peo.on.ca.