

Gas from coal: Progress in technology and funding

Natural gas is in short supply. In Washington, D.C., a gas-rationing program is to go into effect, and other cities face the same shortages. Because of its nonpolluting qualities, especially in power plants, demand for natural gas is growing at an annual rate of about 7 percent. The El Paso Natural Gas Co. estimates that the United States will need 93 billion cubic feet of natural gas daily in 1980, compared with reserves and other sources that can guarantee only 63 billion cubic feet.

For some years, the production of synthetic gas from coal has seemed the most promising approach to the problem. But the promise of nuclear energy plus apathy on the part of Congress and the executive have traditionally resulted in short shrift to research, development and demonstration of coal gasification. Neither Government nor industry has wanted to spend much money—despite the nation's vast coal reserves. But in the past six months, this situation appears to have been reversed dramatically, as both Government and industry commit large resources to coal gasification.

Long before natural gas was avail-

able, gas companies made gas from coal, mainly in urban plants, and the basic process is little changed. Coal is reacted with steam to form carbon monoxide, hydrogen and some methane. The gas thus produced has a relatively low heating value and the added liability that CO is poisonous. But the CO and hydrogen can be reacted to form more methane and the gas can thus be upgraded to make it nearly the equal of natural gas in safety and heating value. It is this "methanation" step that is most difficult and is still not fully proved. But hearings last week before the Senate Interior Committee made clear that most technolo-

Environmental advertising: A question of integrity

Environmentalists have frequently charged that corporations tend to see the environmental crisis as principally a public relations and advertising problem.

Whether or not the allegation is true, a new report published by the Council on Economic Priorities clearly outlines facts showing that much corporate advertising on environmental themes is irrelevant or even deceptive. Further, the report documents another key fact: that a large percentage of the environmental advertising comes from companies that are the worst polluters. These include electric utilities and steel, petroleum, paper and chemical companies. And although the automobile industry is not cited as one of the major environmental advertisers in CEP's survey, many instances are cited of deceptive auto company environmental ads.

CEP was founded by two securities analysts as a nonprofit firm providing information on the practices of U.S. corporations in five major social areas, including the environment. It has been cited favorably in the *Wall Street Journal* and *BUSINESS WEEK*, and Congressional staffers report that it is a reliable information source. But the new study speaks for itself; it simply places advertising claims in apposition with documented truths and allows the reader to draw his own conclusions.

For instance, a Ford Motor Co. ad in a recent *READERS DIGEST* environmental supplement (which is the subject of a major part of the CEP study) says, "As far back as 1961, Ford made changes on some of their cars to curb [hydrocarbons] by installing their first antipollution device." The device alluded to is positive crankcase ventilation (PCV).

Here is what the CEP report says about it: ". . . The PCV program was neither innovative nor voluntary. . . . Ford and all other automobile manufacturers were required by a December 1959 California state law to install proven air pollution control devices on its cars. . . . PCV valves were well known then and had even been used in World War II on military vehicles. . . . In order to comply with this law, Ford agreed to install the valves." Further, says CEP, the valves were installed only in cars going to California; not until 1963, when public pressure had mounted, did Ford (and other auto companies) install them on all cars.

General Motors fares little better than Ford in the analysis. A GM ad boasts of reductions in hydrocarbon and carbon monoxide emissions. The ad, however, fails to note that the reductions were for prototype cars, not cars randomly selected from assembly line production. CEP's claim that only about half the 1971 cars on the road actually meet emission standards is sustained by a recent report from the California Air Resources Board which shows that 61 percent of 1971 Chryslers and 62 percent of 1971 Fords failed at least one emission standard. GM did a little better—only 38 percent of its cars failed. (Foreign cars performed even worse than U.S. vehicles.)

CEP divides the objectionable advertising into three categories: Ads that have no real relevance to environmental problems and use environmental concern as a gimmick (bottled water ads which suggest purchasers somehow contribute to a solution of water pollution problems); ads that mislead by stating broad generalities that omit certain

necessary qualifications (ads by associations of can and bottle manufacturers that tell the reader accurately enough that cans and bottles are only a small percentage of urban solid waste but neglect to mention that they are the most intractable part, because they do not biodegrade and cannot be incinerated); and, finally, ads, such as the GM and Ford ones, that it labels downright deceptive.

Apart from the question of ad credibility, the CEP report raises a fundamental question about the relationships between pollution and advertising. The *READERS DIGEST* supplement stresses the theme that people in general cause pollution and that corporations are merely responding to their desires. Valid as this argument may appear, it is fair to ask to what extent advertising too often creates demands for products that meet no real human needs or meet them poorly and that, additionally, place a heavier load on an already overloaded environment. The CEP report only touches on this question, and undoubtedly detailed behavioral studies of the impact of advertising are required. But one thing CEP does establish is that much environmental advertising attempts to lull people into a belief that the real need for a clean environment is being met. The reality is that often it is not.

There is one optimistic note in the CEP study: Many corporations and corporate executives, say the authors, simply refuse to join the environmental ad game. Such advertising, the advertising manager of a large corporation is quoted as saying, "is not the proper vehicle for serious discussion needed at this point. I would have to call it just commercial exploitation."