

Conservation considered in number of bills

By TOM JACKSON
Of the Emerald

SALEM — This year's drought and the tenuous nature of Oregon's energy future have made energy conservation an issue of both immediate and long-range implications for this legislative session.

The issue has sparked the introduction of more bills than any other single issue. There are nearly 100 bills relating to energy conservation, ranging from a statewide ban on the sale of electric toothbrushes to a statewide tax on all forms of energy.

Most of the bills have received slow action in both House and Senate Committees. But some of them are beginning to move in the closing weeks of the session.

The drought has brought the issue to the attention of many legislators. The case for conservation to minimize the harmful effects of the drought are obvious. The Legislature probably can't do much to ease those effects other than urging citizens to conserve voluntarily, but the Governor's office has already developed a regional energy curtailment plan, to be implemented if and when it is needed.

Support for the concept of energy conservation is virtually unanimous among lawmakers, although there is disagreement over how the issue should be addressed. Legislators also differ over the reasons for long-range energy conservation.

For example, Rep. Nancie Fadeley, D-Eugene, a long time supporter of conservation and a strong opponent of nuclear power, urges conservation as a way to prevent future energy shortages and to maximize the efficient use of natural resources.

"We're never again going to be able to continue to increase energy demand," she says. "It's just unrealistic to think we can continue to use up resources, because our resources are not unlimited."

On the other end of the conservation spectrum is Sen. Dick Groener, D-Milwaukie. Groener has long supported

nuclear power as a solution to future energy needs. He says he believes nuclear power will be necessary to insure that Oregonians will have jobs in the future.

Groener says he supports energy conservation as a way to "buy time" until new nuclear plants can be approved and construction completed.

Many legislators agree that energy conservation will buy time until new sources — whether they be nuclear, solar, wind or geothermal — can be developed and brought in line.

Another important consideration, possibly the most important, is money. Nuclear plants are expensive, and many argue that energy conservation can eliminate the need for more nuclear plants, thereby holding down energy costs for the state's consumers.

The questionable safety of nuclear plants and the depletion of world oil and gas supplies underscore the need for conservation.

Home weatherization is one popular way to conserve energy. A recent Portland area study shows that of all energy in the state, 31 per cent is used by residential customers. Of that, 26 per cent is used for home heating, but 60 per cent of energy used for space heating is wasted because of inadequate insulation.

Cutting down the amount of waste is the goal of many of the bills this session. Tax incentives, low interest loans and informational services are among the most favored ways to lure homeowners to conserve, thereby reducing the state's total energy demands and saving the consumer part of the cost of the monthly power bill.

One of the most comprehensive energy plans is HB 3298, which places a statewide tax on energy users. The revenue generated by the tax — some \$90 million for the next 10 years — will be used for direct home weatherization grants. The bill, which is now in the House Revenue and School Finance Committee, has been criticized as a sales tax on energy, and it may require

voter approval. The bill does not appear likely to pass.

One weatherization bill which does appear likely to pass is HB 2157. Part of Gov. Bob Straub's energy proposals, the bill will create a weatherization low-interest loan program to be administered by investor-owned electric and gas utilities. About 50,000 homeowners are expected to respond to the program, resulting in about \$8.9 million in savings for consumers. The bill was recently passed by the House with only one dissenting vote, and is now in the Senate Environment and Energy Committee.

Another weatherization bill which has been supported by many legislators is HB 2701, which will grant tax incentives to people who install insulation or other weatherization materials. The bill, if passed, will allow a credit of 20 per cent of the cost of the materials or \$1,000, whichever is less. That bill is now in the House Revenue and School Finance Committee, and it has already been passed by the Environment and Energy committee.

A similar bill is HB 2890, which will provide up to \$500 tax credit for insulation. One stumbling block to both the bills is the cost involved. Tax credits cost the state money in revenues, an estimated \$4 million for each of these bills.

Veterans loans are another approach to home weatherization. The state has more control over the veterans loan program than other loan programs, and some bills, including SB 363 and HB 2156, are aimed at making loans available to veterans for insulation. House Bill 2592 would decrease the interest rate for veterans loans used for insulation.

The veterans loan program was given a shot in the arm when the voters approved increases in the veterans program on the May 17 ballot, and that may help the veterans weatherization loan bills to pass the legislature.

One bill, SB 370, had originally called for

the prohibition of the sale of a home unless it met state standards for energy efficiency. That bill ran into serious trouble in committee, and has now been rewritten to create a rating standard for homes. The energy efficiency rating, similar to Environmental Protection Agency mileage ratings for automobiles, is hoped to be used as a sales inducement by realtors to attract home buyers to more efficient homes. The bill was recently passed unanimously by the Senate.

Another bill which has cleared the Senate is SB 818, which would prohibit the sale of gas or oil-powered appliances which use a pilot light. Presently, pilot lights account for about 30 per cent of the gas or oil used by an appliance. The bill calls for the elimination of that waste by allowing only appliances with electrical ignitors to be sold in the state. About 222 million cubic feet of natural gas may be saved annually by passing the bill.

That bill is one of many which attempt to conserve energy by means other than home weatherization. Some of the bills vary from recycling used oil to tax incentives for solar energy facilities to tax incentives for businesses which convert from oil and natural gas to a renewable resource.

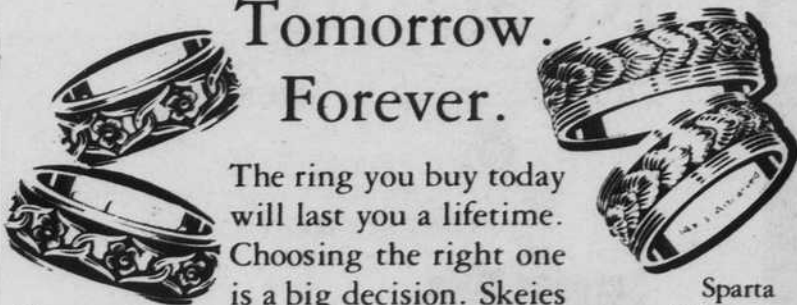
The bill which calls for recycling of used oil, HB 3077, has now been passed by both chambers of the Legislature. After January of 1978, dealers in more than 500 gallons of oil annually must post signs indicating where oil collection points are located. The Environmental Quality Commission will also be charged with public education programs on the importance of oil recycling both for conservation and environmental reasons.

A bill which would provide tax incentives for the installation of an alternative energy device in homes is SB 339. The bill would allow a tax credit of \$1,000 or 25 per cent of the cost of installing such a device, whichever is less. Solar, wind and geo-

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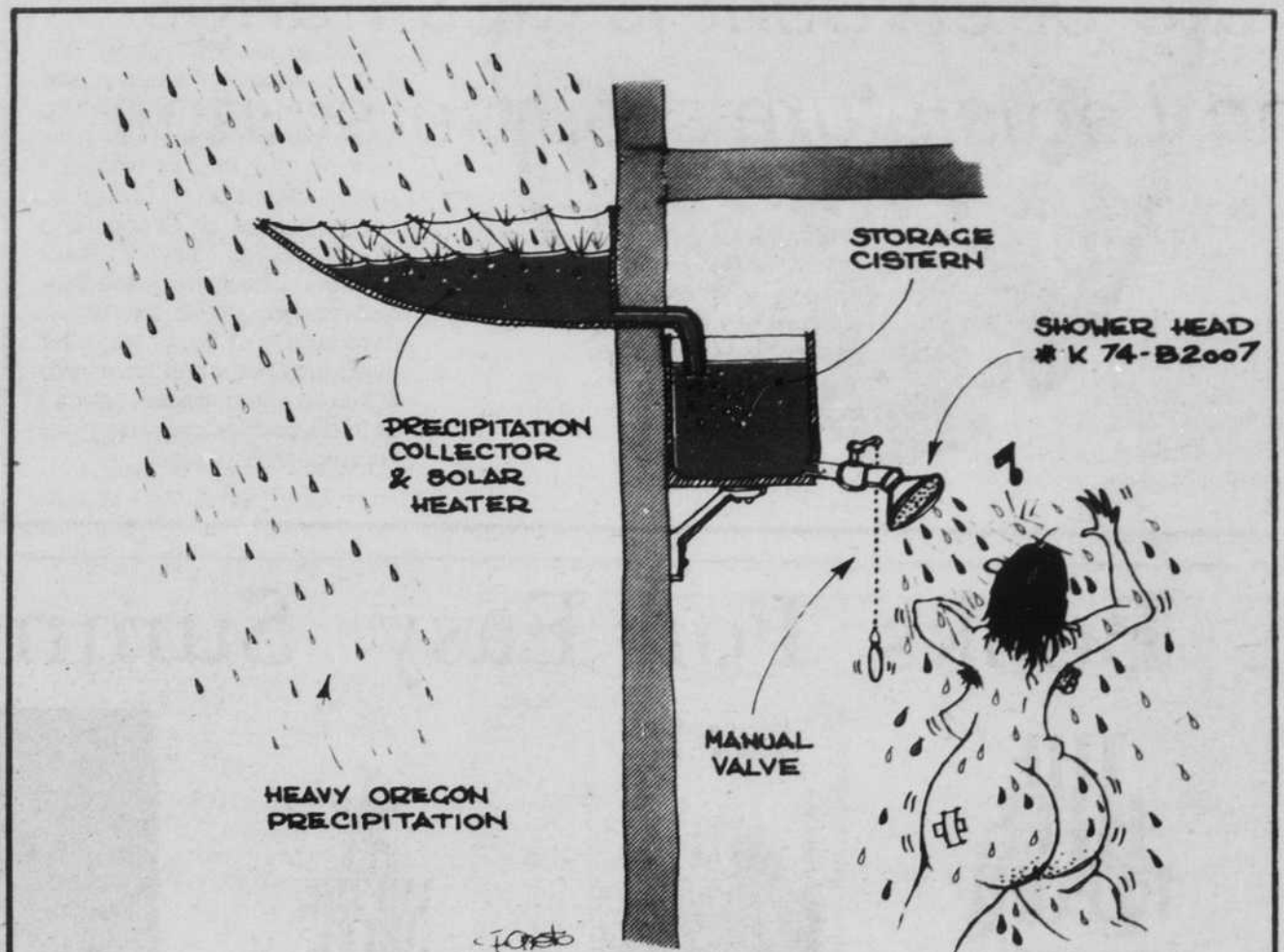


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Dorm contest spurs saving tips

Serving "family style" dinners, reading by candlelight in the bathroom and electing energy czars to monitor light switches would help save energy in the dormitories, according to winners of a recent water and power conservation contest.

The contest, sponsored by the University Housing Department, offered \$25, \$15 and \$10 prizes to dorm residents who came up with the most useful suggestions for saving energy and water in the complexes.

Helen Vozenilek, Hawthorne Hall, won first prize with her suggestion that each dorm elect a person to serve as an energy czar. The czar's duties would include monitoring lights, posting ideas on energy conservation and aiding Project Intercept.

Ann Thompson, Carson Hall, won second prize for her suggestion that the dorms could save large amounts of hot water by cutting down on the number of plates, saucers and bowls each person uses at a meal.

Wendy Stone, Hawthorne Hall, calculates that at least 120,000 watts of electricity could be saved in Hamilton and Walton Halls if bathroom, lobby and hallway lights were turned out during the day and at night when no one is using them. Stone won third prize for her suggestion.

The housing department also awarded honorable mention to a number of suggestions submitted by Gilberto Oneto, Stafford Hall, two of which appear here.