Let the Sun Shine

By Hap Hansen

After spending nearly 30 years in the natural gas energy business, I am frequently asked questions about energy use in general. A few of the questions and my responses:

"Is our planet really warming up?"

"Yes."

"If so, what is the cause?"

"Very likely, it is the continuous burning of fossil fuels, such as oil, coal and natural gas."

"What can we do?"

"We must dramatically increase the development of solar and wind energy at a much faster pace than in the past.

“Why don't we just shut off all oil and gas wells and coal production and force consumers to use solar and wind?"

"Last year, U.S. oil production and use was 9.2 million barrels per day. Natural gas production and use was 7.3 billion cubic feet per day. If we shut that all off, it would be just a short period of time before we would all freeze in the dark. Many more solar and wind installations are needed. Unfortunately, all of the solar and wind developed in the U.S. last year will not even handle the incremental demand for energy.”

"Does fracking cause earthquakes?"

"In some areas, probably. I have been on dozens of fracking operations in Western Colorado and Wyoming. I have not seen or heard of even one instance where earthquakes occurred. Fracking in Oklahoma may be a different story."

"Why don't we use the enormous open spaces in Eastern Colorado and Wyoming to install hundreds of solar and wind emplacements?"

"Over the years, responses to questions like that have changed. When I was in business, I heard hundreds of comments, such as, ‘We don't want oil and gas wells near our community, but because we need the energy, we're happy to have them near your community.’

''Today, similar responses are heard from those same communities about solar and wind installations."

There are seven primary sources of energy. Coal, oil, natural gas, nuclear, falling water, solar and wind. The use of coal to generate electricity has been dramatically reduced and has been replaced with natural gas, which is still a pollutant, but far less than coal. No new nuclear plants have been built for many years, primarily because of the question about what to do with nuclear waste, which can remain radioactive for thousands of years. Falling water only produces a small amount of electricity and no new installations would be acceptable. A scientist has said that we could meet all of our current global energy needs by harvesting the sunlight

striking an area smaller than one-half of one percent of the Sahara desert. However, getting that energy here is currently impossible.

Our Windsor Gardens Board of Directors is considering establishing a solar energy committee to explore the possibility of erecting solar panels on some of our buildings. I have asked to be a member of that committee. The facts remain: The earth is warming. Glaciers are melting. Sea levels are rising. However, I am convinced our energy problems will be resolved before Miami is completely underwater.