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Crude Awakening

By Sarah Phillips
The Guardian UK

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issues

Wednesday 03 October 2007

Sarah Phillips asks why more people aren't talking about the imminent oil supply crisis.

"2007 is likely to go down as the year peak oil went mainstream", predicts David Strahan on the environment pages in today's Guardian

Strahan's book [The Last Oil Shock](#) is likely to play a part in instigating such discussions about the impending oil supply crisis. As is [A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash](#), a powerful Swiss documentary on peak oil, which finally gets a UK cinema release next month.

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In a similar vein to [An Inconvenient Truth](#), the film, which is a collaboration between broadcast journalist, [Basil Gelpke](#), and TV producer, [Ray McCormack](#), and is both shocking and compelling.

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Initially the pair worked on a film about global warming simultaneously. When they learned of Al Gore's project, they decided to stick with oil. The filmmakers have joked that all that is missing from their film is Gore himself. As McCormack explained to me when I met him in London earlier on this year: "It's a lot easier to bring a documentary to the attention of the public if you have a well known figure in front of the camera and sadly we don't have that, so we're at a bit of a disadvantage."

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Taking part in the film for McCormack, a self-confessed "greenie", was a no-brainer. Already living his principles - he has not owned a car for 13 years and is a member of a 40,000 strong car pool in Switzerland, where he lives - this was the perfect opportunity to spread the word.

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Nevertheless *A Crude Awakening* is an impressive documentary in its own right and has achieved a great deal already without a big name on the poster. It has been screened at numerous festivals, was seen on general release in Canada and Switzerland and is scheduled to be shown on television in several countries, including America.

Reactions to the film have been overwhelmingly positive. [David Herron at 7gen](#), describes it as: "a visually stunning, boldly prophetic testament which provokes not just thought but

action." [The Guardian's Mark Oliver](#) says it is "one of the most frightening films you are ever likely to see." And [Brian Carr, of Daily Fuel Economy Tip](#), attests: "The thing that impressed me the most about A Crude Awakening was the fact that the information was presented in a relatively non-slanted way; this wasn't a Michael Moore type of "documentary" rather it was, in essence, an hour and a half long public service announcement asking us to wake up to the reality that at some point the world is going to run out of oil and we need to take steps now to ensure that when that day comes we'll be prepared."

McCormack says: "For a lot of people, their initial reaction is complete shock at the content of the film, the idea that we're so dependent on oil, it's in every aspect of our lives, and that the production of it is going to fall off very soon. It's not disbelief, but shock and a realisation of just how unprepared we are for the future as oil production starts to fall off."

This surprise is something that McCormack himself can relate to, as despite taking a degree in environmental policy, he hadn't really encountered peak oil until Gelpke approached him with the film. "I'd never come across it and that's what startled me. As soon as it is explained it's totally rational and logical. Oil is a non-renewable resource, so it's going to run out sooner or later. And before it runs out, production will start to fall."

But despite there being an alarming lack of awareness about peak oil, there are an increasing number of people from varying sides of the political spectrum who are not only aware of the problem at hand, but prepared to speak openly about it. One surprise of A Crude Awakening is the amount of conservative voices gladly stepping forward to share their views on the debate. These range from a Republican congressman, an energy advisor to George Bush and a former Iraqi oil minister. The only eco-warrior is the hugely entertaining, Matthew Savinar, founder of lifeaftertheoilcrash.net.

On the subject of Iraq, McCormack makes it clear that he feels peak oil is very much a political issue: "Most people now can see that one of the reasons for going into Iraq was to secure oil. When a country has only a few percent of the world's oil reserves and consumes 22% of the world's oil reserves, their decision to invade a country that is rich in oil has to be part of their geopolitical strategy and not purely to bring democracy to a country that will be impossible to democratise."

As the film proves, oil may be an intrinsic part of our present and future, but why aren't more people talking about it?

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