

**IT MAY HAVE SNUCK UP ON US ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLY. AS CANADA** has mastered the art of extracting oil from the oilsands at a reasonable cost, on top of continuing to improve upon conventional oil and gas recovery, we have become what our prime minister recently called an “energy superpower.”

On the eve of the G8 summit of industrialized nations in July, Stephen Harper went on to say the federal government would build Canada into a “global energy powerhouse.”

Technological advances, combined with the country’s natural endowment of resources, have indeed placed the country in an enviable position. Since diminishing North Sea production recently put Britain back into the position of a net energy importer, Canada, with the exception of Russia, is now the only G8 country that can call itself an energy exporter. With oil prices pushing \$80 (US) a barrel, that could provide an enormous economic advantage going forward.

Harper noted Canada is the world’s fifth largest energy producer (including all forms of energy), with the third highest gas production and seventh highest oil production. It may not be a big surprise that the rest of the world is only now beginning to recognize these facts. What is surprising, though, is Canadians’ lack of knowledge about our emerging stature as a fossil fuel major.


Just a month before the prime minister’s comments, a survey commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Energy Information found that most Canadians believe the country imports more than half its gasoline needs. As anyone familiar with the oilpatch knows, Canada is a net exporter of gasoline, having exported six billion of the 46.1 billion litres we produced in 2005. Any imports of gasoline in Eastern Canada — occasionally made necessary, for instance, due to refinery maintenance — is more than offset by exports from Alberta. Yet just 15% of those surveyed believed that 70% or more of our gasoline is domestically supplied.

While Quebec appeared the least informed, with just five per cent of respondents believing domestic gasoline production was 70% or

higher, even in Alberta, the very core of the petroleum sector, recognition of that level of production stood at just 36%. Further, the Ipsos Reid Research survey found that more than a third of those surveyed thought Canada has higher fuel prices than those found in Europe or Japan, markets where gasoline is actually almost twice the cost of the fuel in Canada.

If Canadians are as glaringly unaware of the source of the gas they pump into their cars, one has to wonder about the level of awareness concerning other aspects of the energy industry — such as how technologically advanced and how vital to the economy it has become. Under those circumstances, is it any wonder we are facing a growing shortage of young professionals seeking to enter the energy industry?

Such alarming misperceptions suggest the industry and governments are doing a poor job of informing Canadians of the progress that has been achieved in recent years to ramp up production. Output from what Harper called “an ocean of oil-soaked sand” that lies under the muskeg of northern Alberta, in particular, came about only after decades of incremental technological advances that have made extraction profitable. The energy industry is not only the biggest industry on the planet, it is also one of the most technologically advanced, and Canada plays second fiddle to nobody when it comes to technology development and deployment, as regular readers of *New Technology Magazine* can attest. Apparently, however, awareness of that fact may not have seeped very far beyond the core of the oilpatch.

At a time when energy security has risen to the top of the agenda across the industrialized world — it was a major focus of the G8 meeting just completed — and as nations move to implement energy policies reflecting the new realities of increased scarcity and higher prices, it behooves us to, at the very least, become aware of the energy situation in Canada. Informed debate on any decisions regarding our own energy policy, including support for research and development to further improve production, should be based on a firm understanding of the true state of the industry.  — **Maurice Smith**

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