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# Editorial



## Getting Serious About Critical Issues

**G**lobal climate change, alternative energy options, and the viability of nuclear energy — these are all issues that affect us on all levels. Chemical engineers are working in all facets of these areas, whether it is in researching trends, developing more environmentally friendly processes, or even dealing with the political aspects of these issues.

AICHE has taken the lead role as facilitator of discussions in these areas with the introduction of the premier Critical Issues Series (CIS) forum, titled “Energy and a Sustainable Planet,” held at the 2002 Spring National Meeting (New Orleans; March 10–14; pp. 11–12). The brainchild of AICHE executive director John Sofranko, CIS was designed to “bring together people with diverse points of view,” said current AICHE president Sid Sapakie — and this is exactly what it has done.

With standing-room only in the first forum on global climate change, Eileen Claussen, president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change set the tone of the forum with her informative, yet critical, viewpoint on global climate change. A particular area of interest was the U.S. rejection of the Kyoto Protocol and President Bush’s alternative solution. According to Claussen, “the President’s goal of an 18% reduction in GHG intensity by 2012 actually amounts to a 12% increase in actual emissions. In other words, the target is no more than business as usual.”

Policy was also the focal point of the second forum on alternative energy options (e.g., biomass, wind and solar). For the most part, all speakers agreed that policy, and not technology, was going to be the key obstacle in implementing these options. “Clean power options are technically and economically available now, but policy shifts are needed to enable them to achieve their full potential,” said Howard Learner, president and executive director of the Environmental Law and Policy Center.

In the third and final CIS forum, there was a heated debate about the Yucca Mountain’s effectiveness as a single deep repository for nuclear waste. Unlike a majority of the other panelists, Arjun Makhijani, president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, spoke negatively about the proposed repository. He noted this proposal is “contrary to common sense and the second law of thermodynamics. The Yucca Mountain is an oxidizing environment, and putting metal waste containers can only result in corrosion of the containers and eventual leakage.”

AICHE has effectively opened a dialogue for these critical issues — issues that not only affect the environment, but also play a key role in homeland security. By improving on existing technologies so as to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, implementing new alternative technologies, or taking another look at nuclear energy, the U.S. is attempting to diversify its energy portfolio, which in the end, will lessen our nation’s dependence on foreign supplies.

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