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ABSTRACT

Concerned with formulating a methodology that would best enable West Virginia's Solar Technology Transfer Program to work, the participants in a planning conference held on April 18 and 19, 1979, met to isolate techniques and objectives that would most effectively allow consumer access to solar energy information, and emphasized the role of public libraries as delivery agents. Deliberations resulted in the adoption of the following planning objectives: (1) to promote public awareness of solar information packets, (2) to disseminate all types of solar energy information through libraries and schools, (3) to encourage cooperation among the various agencies concerned, (4) to update and evaluate solar literature, (5) to train and develop the staffs who will transmit solar information to the public, (6) to expand the content of information packets into other energy areas, (7) to use the program model as a means of strengthening services and expanding public awareness in other areas, and (8) to evaluate the effectiveness of the packets and the strategies used in accomplishing the above objectives. The planning group hoped that the methodology used to implement the Program would be useful in the dissemination of other types of information. (FM)

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SOLAR TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION TRANSFER IN WEST VIRGINIA

A Report of the Planning Conference

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*The Solar Technology Transfer Program is administered by the Southeastern Library Association, Atlanta, Georgia
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**SOLAR TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION TRANSFER IN WEST VIRGINIA,
A report of the planning conference.**

On April 18 and 19, 1979, a planning conference for Solar Technology Information Transfer was held at the Charleston House Holiday Inn, Charleston, West Virginia. Twenty-four individuals planned to attend; twenty did -- and all actively participated. The results of their deliberations are hereinafter outlined.

INTRODUCTION: In simplest definition, the Solar Technology Transfer Program is one designed to deliver sound, quality information on one particular alternate energy source -- solar energy -- to a concerned and interested public, especially those who might consider using solar energy themselves. The most apparent rationale must be that where there is an expressed information need there must be materials readily available to meet that need. While solar technology has achieved a national prominence and has been given considerable publicity, it is still a relatively new discipline. Materials in the field, limited a few years ago, are now growing in quantity and scope. Thus, the Solar Technology Transfer Program is one attempt to gather together some of that material and present it to the public in a manner that guarantees correct information and sound recognition of public needs and concerns. To formulate the methodology that would best enable the Program to work effectively in West Virginia was the basic concern of the planning session.

The Solar Technology Transfer Program recognizes the growing amount of material in the field, the growing consumer demand for sound, unbiased information, and the consequent necessity for expeditious delivery. It also recognizes that both resources -- all available information -- and means for delivery -- all forms -- have equal importance. Thus, the Program couples information sources, hand-picked, and isolates on one form of delivery -- the public libraries of West Virginia. The basic purpose of the planning session, therefore, was to isolate techniques and objectives that would best allow consumer access to solar energy information.

There was general agreement with those assumptions. There was also agreement that the solar energy packets used during the program, while limited in scope, would offer a sound medium against which to test the assumptions and objectives of the planning session. At the same time there was general concern over what impact a discussion of solar energy might have in West Virginia. Those concerns will be outlined before proceeding with the body of this paper.

First, West Virginia's climate, topography, and industrial particulate pollution all act as factors diminishing sunshine within West Virginia. Of all continental states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii), West Virginia ranks 47th in amounts of average daily sunshine. During winter, several days of total cloud cover are common; several days of sunshine are rare. Topography, particularly

in valley communities, mean much less sun, even on sunny days. In many localities, only a few hours of direct sunlight daily are common. Particulate and other pollution, especially in heavily industrialized areas (most notably the Ohio and Kanawha valleys) further lessens sunshine -- even more so when particulate pollution contributes to frequent and heavy groundfogs. All these factors mean that solar energy usages will be less effective in West Virginia than in Colorado. That does not mean, however, that the public should not be offered basic solar energy information. To make choices, and to evaluate any consideration of solar energy as a possible alternate in West Virginia, consumers must be offered basic solar technology information. Only with that information can the West Virginia consumer make an intelligent choice.

Secondly, West Virginia is an energy producing state, one of the few that produces more energy than it consumes. Coal does play a major, if not the major, economic role in West Virginia. Consequently, an emphasis on solar energy -- or on any non-fossil alternate energy source -- must be influenced by coal. No single source of energy, fossil or non-fossil, can be considered without, at the same time, considering future and alternate uses of coal. For example, any major breakthrough in any alternate energy source would probably hasten, within West Virginia, research for uses of coal other than as a direct fuel or energy source.

With these two concerns aside, there was mutual agreement at the planning conference that solar energy is a major item of public interest; all felt consumer demand for sound solar technology information is growing; and all agencies represented felt a responsibility to see that public interest be satisfied at the highest possible level. Many conferees also emphasized the fact that literature on solar energy must emphasize its shortcomings as well as its potentials. In general, the Solar Technology Transfer Program was seen as a sound model upon which to base a general program of public information. While the model stressed solar energy only, there was consensus that the packet methodology should be expanded to other areas of energy and conservation.

As stated before, the Solar Technology Transfer Program sees public libraries as the prime delivery agent for quality solar energy information. The program is funded from the United States Department of Energy through the Southern Solar Energy Center Planning Project under contract for overall administration of the program to the Southeastern Library Association, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. Direct administrative responsibility rests with the Executive Director of the Association, with training responsibility delegated to one staff person. Major responsibility for gathering and critiquing information rests with the Southern Solar Energy Center, Atlanta, Georgia. There is an obviously close working relationship between the two Atlanta agencies.

During the planning session, representatives of the Southeastern Library Association and the Southern Solar Energy Center presented their "solar energy packet" and outlined the major thrusts of the Solar Technology Transfer Program to participants whose eventual responsibility would be to implement the program in West Virginia. Representatives from the following offices and agencies attended: The Center for Extension and Continuing Education, West Virginia University, Morgantown; the West Virginia State Department of Education, Charleston; the Board of Regents of West Virginia, Charleston; local officers of the Southeastern Library Association; the West Virginia Fuel and Energy Office, a division of the Governor's Office of Economic and Community Development, Charleston; the West Virginia Library Commission, Charleston; the Engineering Library of the University of West Virginia, Morgantown; the West Virginia Institute of Technology, Montgomery; West Virginia State College, Institute; and the Consumer Protection Division of the West Virginia Attorney General, Charleston.

Immediately after the planning session, representatives of the West Virginia Library Commission and the Southeastern Library Association would hold training sessions for about 100 key public library personnel -- generally those on reference staffs or those who would be the first-line personnel contact for the general public in their search for information on solar energy. Training sessions were to be held in four regions of West Virginia during the last week in April, 1979.

PLANNING OBJECTIVES: After two full days of deliberation, participants concurred on eight objectives. They are summarized below and reported in rough approximation of the order discussion occurred. There is no attempt to place priority on any objective, only to report what appeared to be group concerns.

1. **PROMOTION:** Common to both days of discussion was an emphasis that for the solar energy packets to be used effectively, there must be a real public awareness of them, and that awareness should transcend news releases that media would either bury or not use at all. Fully one-third of the discussion was devoted to publicity and promotion. Five major areas for delivery were discussed.

a. Radio and television spot announcements were highly endorsed. There was a possibility that the Fuel and Energy Office could supply seed funds for the production and distribution of media spots. The Southern Solar Energy Center offered to supply informational tapes and spots. The West Virginia Library Commission offered to explore the possibility of the use of its full studio facilities to produce locally tapes and cassettes.

b. The Fuel and Energy Office promised to place rubber-stamped endorsements of the program and packets on appropriate outgoing mail. The stamped message, provided to the Fuel and Energy

Office by the West Virginia Library Commission, would be simple: "For further information on solar energy, contact your local public library."

c. Short fillers and spots could be produced for use on public access channels of all West Virginia cable television franchises.

d. The Program and packets could be promoted by short announcements in such periodicals as The State Superintendent's Newsletter, West Virginia Libraries, The School Librarian's Newsletter or any other pertinent professional publication.

e. Posters, which would not only announce the Solar Technology Transfer Program, but also identify those state agencies participating in the Program might be placed in public libraries, grocery and drug stores, and other suitable places.

f. The West Virginia Library Commission and the Fuel and Energy Office would share responsibility for this objective.

2. DISSEMINATION of solar energy information. While this objective restates the very purpose of the planning session, conferees still felt this obvious objective needed expansion and restatement. Five major strategies emerged.

a. Librarians must recognize the different audiences involved, especially in terms of interest, expertise, and reading levels. Consequently, packet materials must be evaluated and classified to fulfill varied information needs and expectations. Of special importance was the need for library staffs, especially those manning public desks, to be aware of those differences. Those levels of need and expectation should be emphasized during training sessions.

b. About 100 librarians, as mentioned in the introduction, would be trained to make the public aware of the availability of the packet materials and other pertinent materials in the subject area.

c. The group felt that sound, basic information on solar energy was available from many other sources than those in the packet. Of special concern was the profusion of federal and state documents, usually available only at designated depository libraries. That fact, together with peculiar classification and retrieval systems, significantly different from those commonly used in libraries, make government documents hard to use and find for both library staffs and the general public. Consequently, the planning group felt such materials should be retrieved, identified, classified, and be made immediately available to the general public as a visible and valuable auxiliary to packet materials and other trade materials promoted and disseminated as part of the project.

d. The group felt that adequate safeguards against loss and theft of materials should be maintained. Speedy replacement of any missing materials should be ensured.

e. As another objective, with particular emphasis on classroom teacher, the group felt public school students in West Virginia needed better access to solar energy information. As a possible first source, the group felt that the Southeastern Library Association and the Southern Solar Energy Center should request the Department of Energy Technical Information Center, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, to supply pertinent, graded materials to West Virginia classroom teachers. The request should further ask the Center to serve as a regional resource for states supplied with solar energy information by the Southern Solar Energy Center. Also, the group felt a need for an in-state mechanism or clearing-house to serve the solar information needs of classroom teachers. This effort would be coordinated by the West Virginia State Superintendent of Schools and the Fuel and Energy Office.

f. With the exception of that objective pertaining to classroom teachers, prime responsibility for overseeing this overall objective would rest with the West Virginia Fuel and Energy Office and the West Virginia Library Commission.

3. COOPERATION: Most apparent during the planning session was the overarching willingness of all agencies to share personnel, resources, and ideas. Each area of discussion immediately focused on which groups would work together. Also apparent was the seeming lack of turf problems. Major cooperative efforts coming from the session included the following sub-objectives:

a. Promotion: During the discussion of the promotional objective, the first cooperative venture occurred. The West Virginia Library Commission, the Fuel and Energy Office, the Center for Extension and Continuing Education of West Virginia University, the West Virginia Board of Regents, the Office of Consumer Affairs of the West Virginia Attorney General -- as well as the Southern Solar Energy Center and the Southeastern Library Association -- all agreed to cooperatively promote the packets.

b. Under the aegis of the West Virginia Library Commission, a format would be established for further cooperation between state agencies concerning matters of public information. Initial contacts would be made between the West Virginia Library Commission and agency public information officers.

c. The group will attempt to cooperatively evaluate grassroots impact and acceptance of the solar energy packets. Interested members of the group intend to meet at an unspecified future date to establish means and criteria for this evaluation.

d. Future meetings to foster the first cooperative effort should be set on a regular basis. No real format nor dates were set.

e. The Fuel and Energy Office and the Center for Extension and Continuing Education of West Virginia University have plans to generate and mutually sponsor a state-wide newsletter focusing on energy concerns. The West Virginia State Board of Regents plans to establish a format for energy experts and educators in West Virginia colleges and universities to meet.

f. Major coordinating responsibility for this objective will rest with the West Virginia Library Commission.

4. UPDATING: Solar energy, really not a new technology -- truly as old as the sun -- has achieved a sudden national prominence. Consequently, solar literature should be in state of flux for some time to come. Therefore, the group saw need for on-going evaluation of materials, discarding of obsolete or inaccurate materials, and additions of pertinent, newer materials. This objective would hold true not only for packet materials (the demonstration), but also for materials in the general fields of solar and alternate energies. Two major thrusts emerged from the planning session:

a. The Fuel and Energy Office will coordinate a state-wide effort to identify uses of solar technology in West Virginia. That effort would encourage written critiques of those uses and make those evaluations available to libraries within West Virginia.

b. Establish a format for working with William M. Asten, science writer with the West Virginia University News Service, to up-date and expand his Directory of Energy Experts at West Virginia University (Office of University Relations, West Virginia University, Morgantown, 1979). The expansion of his listing would attempt to bring in other experts in all forms of alternate energy, conservation, and coal now working in West Virginia. The expansion would include teachers, practitioner, consultants, and speakers. The listing would have state-wide distribution.

5. TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT: Success or failure of any program rests almost entirely with the people whom the public meets directly. Certainly, with the Solar Technology Transfer Program in West Virginia, public credibility will be best gauged by the reception the general public is given by library staffs. While the initial training workshops will train approximately 100 librarians, the group felt that the quality of that staff must be closely examined, particularly as to what reference skills and techniques that staff uses in its focus on public concern over solar technology. Training and development become particular problems when one considers that, as a national pattern, libraries are not seen by the general public as a first, prime source for information -- in fact, libraries are often the 1st source. Consequently, training should not only focus on a short-term project (the Solar Technology Transfer Program), but also on the daily information process in public libraries. Items for present and future training sessions would include:

a. Basic training (or a re-focus) in library reference skills. Training should concentrate on those procedures which most successfully isolate the particular information consumers want. Packet materials, for example, are useless to an individual unless a librarian can show the individual where and how to locate what best meets his informational needs in solar energy.

b. Library staffs should be aware of those postures that can turn off a consumer at the point of inquiry. Public agencies tend to be looked upon with a certain amount of public suspicion. Rules and regulations are conceived by the public -- often with great justification -- as red tape. Consequently, present and future training should focus on means of eliminating that public distrust.

c. The West Virginia Library Commission has full capabilities of producing training tapes for any educational purpose. It would welcome inquiries from the Southern Solar Energy Center, or the Department of Energy for that matter, concerning the production of educational and informational tapes on a regional or national level.

d. The group also saw general need for continuing education in the field of solar and alternate technologies. No format was established, but the issue was marked a priority for future discussion.

e. The West Virginia Library Commission would serve as a clearing-house for this objective.

6. EXPANSION of packets and their materials into other energy areas. Using the solar energy packet developed for the Solar Technology Transfer Program as a workable model, the group felt similar packets should be developed for other forms of alternate energy. Such an effort would require good reportage of other areas of public concern public librarians saw expressed. Two prominent areas of concern most frequently mentioned were energy conservation and uses of coal. In the latter, the use of coal other than in direct energy production -- gasification, liquefaction, as a source of textiles, synthetics, and fertilizers -- was given great emphasis. This objective was a general concern for all agencies and will serve as a future agenda item.

7. SPIN-OFFS: There was unanimity in seeing a single-issue demonstration (solar technology) as benefiting day-to-day operations, as well as establishing criteria for working within other areas. The group, it appeared, was most concerned with using the Solar Technology Transfer Program model as a means of strengthening services and expanding public awareness in other areas, many of which might have no relation at all to energy, let alone solar energy. In other words, solar energy, and particularly the methods used to better inform the public about the state of the art in solar technology would have definite uses in other areas. Informational packets on nuclear power and coal were immediate concerns.

8. EVALUATION: The group also concluded unanimously that the effectiveness of the packets and the various strategies conceived and used in its promotion and dissemination, in the development of the cooperative spirit that it fostered, in its updating, in the various training components, in its expansion and usefulness in other areas, must all be evaluated.

a. The West Virginia Library Commission will coordinate the evaluation and develop evaluative criteria. Other agencies present during the planning session will be involved in the evaluation, under the general guidelines promulgated by the Commission. Evaluation will take place within 60 to 90 days of the close of the Solar Technology Transfer Program demonstration in West Virginia. A further meeting of the planning group will be scheduled as a de-briefing session, during which strengths and weaknesses of the demonstration will be analyzed.

b. The Southern Solar Energy Center should recognize evaluation as vital for all its future programs, not only for the Solar Technology Transfer Program. It should develop strategies, criteria, and format for the evaluation of all future or similar programs, if such standards have not already been established.

CONCLUSION: During the planning session, and during the formulation of the eight stated objectives for West Virginia, one fact became very apparent to this author: Of prime importance to the planners was not solar energy, nor for that matter, any other alternate energy source, nor coal, nor even energy itself. Concern was not with developing or recommending energy policy for the state of West Virginia. Concern rested almost entirely with the methodology used in presenting the Solar Technology Transfer Program packet of materials at the consumer level and its resulting impact on and use by the citizens of West Virginia. What the group appeared to be asking was, "Will the packets work?; if so, why?; if not, why not?" Consequently, if the Solar Technology Transfer Program has a lasting impact within West Virginia, it will probably rest with those successful components in the delivery system itself.

Those components might be used to present materials of great public concern in entirely different areas than solar technology. And of greatest value -- should the group expand upon its obvious enjoyment of working together -- would be much greater cooperation between many agencies of state government. What became most apparent is that West Virginia welcomed the Solar Technology Transfer Program with open arms -- not so much for the expansion of information on solar energy it brought to West Virginia, but as much and more so for the methodology the Program brought with it. If the method proves worthwhile, it is apparent it will be repeated elsewhere within West Virginia.