

Peak oil

Oil is a substance so useful to us, in an industrialised society, that we have become entirely dependent on the black liquid for our everyday lives'. But like any finite resource there comes a point when more has been consumed than exists in reserves. The maximum rate of production is known as a “peak”, which brings with it problems for the future.

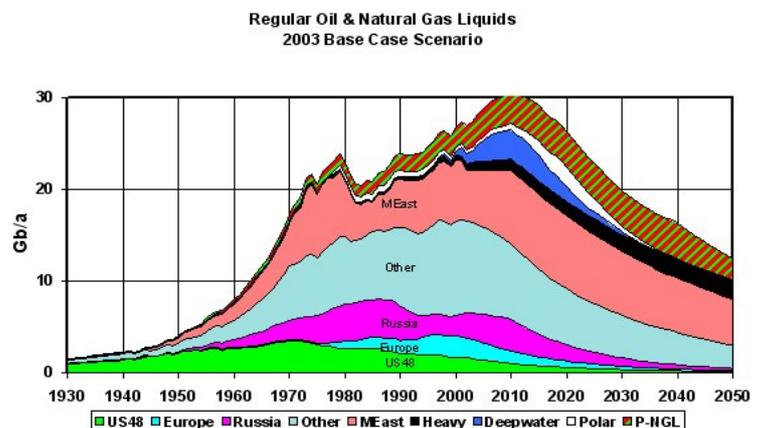
Our use of oil

Industrialised countries, such as the UK, are entirely reliant on fossil fuels to function. Food is produced, processed and distributed using oil; electricity is produced from gas and coal (amongst other resources); plastics are made of oil; goods are transported using oil; transport is reliant on electricity or oil...and so the list goes on.

Of all the fossil fuels, oil is by far the most important because it has so many uses, is easy to transport and so much of our infrastructure relies upon its existence. Furthermore, we have become accustomed to a constant supply of oil at relatively cheap prices.

A peak in production

The point at which any resource is half used there is a peak, the maximum amount of production that can occur. This is the case with oil, and many oil geologists are predicting we are very close to that peak on a global basis. After the peak has been reached oil becomes more scarce, more difficult to extract and consequently more expensive.



Peak of worldwide oil production and consequent decline

Combine this with a constantly rising demand, driven by the newly emerging industrial societies of the East, and a crunch comes in availability. In short oil will become more expensive and less available – which will have major impacts on every part of our lives.

Find out more →

[Richard Heinberg: peak oil explained](#)
[Matt Simmons: global oil production](#)

Likely timescale

Many oil geologists (not environmentalists) are predicting that peak oil will occur at some point between 2007 and 2013; others are more optimistic and suggesting 2020 and beyond. There are two problems with predicting the peak. Firstly, it cannot be determined until after the event has happened (and results prove a downward trend). [Find out more](#)  [Peak oil timescales](#)

Secondly, it is thought many countries, particularly those with large reserves, are overstating their actual reserves for social, political or financial reasons. This specific allegation has been levelled at Saudi Arabia in particular, which is thought to have up to one fifth of the world's known reserves. A shortfall in expected reserves clearly has major consequences. [Find out more](#)  [Twilight in the desert](#)

What is apparent is that we currently have no strategy in place to cope with peak oil and its eventual demise, on a local, regional or national level.

Peak everything

As mentioned before, *any* finite resource can become over-used, leading to depletion.

Peaks in production will occur not just with oil, but also with natural gas and metals – including uranium. Any peak will have major knock-on effects on society. [Find out more](#)  [Richard Heinberg: Peak everything](#)

Solutions

You don't have to wait for the Government to put plans in place for a post-peak oil future. Everyone can take steps to reduce their vulnerability to oil prices and availability – this is known as increasing resilience. Resilience, a term borrowed from ecology, is described as “the capacity of an ecosystem to tolerate disturbance without collapsing... a resilient ecosystem can withstand shocks and rebuild itself when necessary.”

This same principle can be applied to human society. An oil-dependent society has poor resilience as it can't adapt well to external shocks. However, we can take many steps today to reduce our dependence on oil, for example:

- Use renewable energy to heat and power our homes and buildings
- Buy local food and grow our own food using organic methods
- Reduce our need and demand for travel – especially long distance
- Walk and cycle more locally
- Use natural, durable, re-usable and recyclable materials

Many of these steps lead to a higher quality of life and allow individuals and communities to wean themselves off their addiction to oil. Oil is an incredible resource and it should be treated like a luxury rather than a necessity. [Find out more](#) 

[Rob Hopkins: local resilience](#)