THE SUNSET OF CHEAP ENERGY: GREY SKIES AND SILVER LININGS FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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A predictable and perilous confluence has led to expanding understanding how the impacts of climate change coincide with the acceleration of economic and societal ramifications of increasing costs for fossil fuels, particularly petroleum. The problem is compounded by rising populations, increased world energy demands, disproportionately high energy use by many developed countries and numerous ecological threats. Over the next few years, as human activity compounds problems across multiple environmental domains, the world faces undulating periods of instability and decline in energy and financial markets as well as ongoing threats of regional and international conflicts over dwindling cheap energy and other resources. This presentation explains how increased energy costs in an era of increasing pressure to reduce carbon emissions will likely result in major economic and social disruptions falling heavily on the transportation sector, agriculture and vulnerable populations while stressing public health delivery systems. It is meant to spark attention, interest and debate with the hope that it will lead to more quantification and understanding of the manifestation to the injury prevention field while simultaneously posing new injury risks and benefits as limits to growth in a finite world become clearer. As the debate shifts from when, to at what rate the worlds cheap energy resources will decline, safety and injury prevention professionals should be aware of these issues and prepare to react because the more precipitous the rate of cheap energy decline the less time to adapt to the ramifications. Recommendations for research and action are presented.