

Making Ripples

The US Military's War on Climate Change

by Amanda Bancroft

You might have a hard time convincing your neighbor that alternative energy is not just for hippies, but the military is already convinced. Without donning flower wreaths and promoting peace, they have the potential – and, it seems, the determination – to make a bigger impact in the fight against climate change than perhaps all the world's hippies combined.

Frances Beinecke, President of the Natural Resources Defense Council, writes in the magazine *Podar* that “U.S. Armed Services have been strengthening military operations with clean energy innovation, from Air Force jets that fly on American-grown biofuels to portable solar devices for Navy SEALs.” The Army is setting the bar high: “zero net energy consumption by 2030.”

According to Beinecke, “The U.S. Department of Defense is the largest single consumer of fuel in the entire world.” In fact, the Pentagon spends more on air conditioning tents in Iraq and Afghanistan than NASA's entire budget. While it doesn't contribute to peace efforts when the military uses alternative energies to do its job more efficiently, it does create demand. This is awesome for the farmer who wishes they could afford a solar panel, not for the purpose of killing terrorists and unlucky civilians, but to power a greenhouse for increasing access to organic local foods.

Ironically, Ripples works with people worldwide who are often innocent victims of our military's occupation of their country, but we stand to benefit from the military's enthusiasm in “going green.” If a power such as the Department of Defense can create demand for clean energy and shift the market to make it more accessible, we can then use those tools for peace. We can use former weapons of war – such as the internet, which was inspired by defense purposes – to generate infinite possibilities for reducing harm, increasing health, and creating a thriving planet.

Two-thirds of the world doesn't have access to internet, which means less access to health information, less connection to services, and fewer opportunities to begin and grow their small farm or business. Mark Zuckerberg plans to put the entire world online (and on Facebook). Muhammad Yunus also supports access for all, citing that it would help anyone anywhere make the biggest change possible, more quickly. If the military can give access to solar panels for all, this will enable us to make the biggest change possible, and more quickly than we might have done otherwise.

Internet access is a surprisingly life-saving resource if you're in the thick of things without it. The military is learning quickly how life-saving clean energy can be, too. “More than 1,000 Americans have died on fuel-related missions in Iraq and Afghanistan,” writes Beinecke. If the

military's clean energy trend continues, more people might realize that being a hippie with a sustainable lifestyle is as much about saving lives as being a doctor in the Army.

Ripples is a 100% solar-hosted website that includes a blog, newspaper column, resources and services for individuals and non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org