

NATIONWIDE ALERT FOR OIL CONSERVATION!

Mrs Leena Mehendale, Executive Director, PCRA, speaks to Our Correspondent about the prevailing oil crisis and the steps being taken to overcome it.

By Seema Dhawan

A nationwide alarm was raised after the oil crisis in 1973, as it brought into sharp focus the need for conservation of petroleum products. Experts realised that this was not a subject which could be closed down once the crisis was over. Rather, continuity has to be maintained. Hence, the Government of India constituted a Petroleum Conservation Action Group (PCAG) in 1976, which was later rechristened Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA), to stave off a crisis in future.

Associated to PCRA for about 2½ years as an Executive Director of the Association, Mrs Leena Mehendale, who is a senior IAS of Maharashtra cadre and also a Hindi and Marathi writer, is very sensitive about this issue and wants to bring about a revolution through various programmes of PCRA. It is observed that energy consumption in India is much less than in developed countries, however the wastage percentage is quite high.

Excerpts from the interview:

What are the nature and functions of PCRA?

PCRA carries out a number of conservation activities in various sectors — industry, transport, commercial, agriculture and domestic, the most important being energy audits, which help improve energy efficiency and reduce energy bills. They are primarily aimed at identifying the possible areas of



Mrs Leena Mehendale

improvement in energy use efficiency and promotion of fuel-efficient practices, equipment and technology in industries. PCRA energy audits have revealed that substantial energy savings can be realised with nil or marginal investment.

During the year 2002-2003, PCRA carried out energy use studies and identified potential savings of nearly 80,000 tons of oil equivalent (OE).

PCRA strives to keep pace with the changing scenario in the country with regard to energy supplies, consumption, environment and related issues and formulate programmes and policies to address the future demands.

Follow-up on previously conducted studies resulted in actual savings of approximately 21,093 tons OE.

PCRA initiates and sponsors projects in various reputed institutions for developing energy-efficient equipment, processes and appliances, organising laboratory test and evaluation of additives and devices, recommending field trials, commercialisation of products and processes and also the promotion of inter-fuel substitution.

PCRA has succeeded in introducing a number of products and processes that reduce the consumption of electricity and oil by around 15%.

How does PCRA reach the people of different sectors in creating awareness regarding the need of conservation?

Unless and until we make the general public aware, it is not possible to conserve oil and electricity. The problem here is that though people are aware of the crisis, they are not serious about conservation. Building up of the right attitude is required. For this we create mass awareness programmes, outdoor publicities, model depot studies, driver-training programmes, apart from conducting usual seminars, workshops and training programmes for different sectors. We also organise Oil and Gas Conservation Fortnight every year in January all over the country.

Two months ago, we had a national level seminar in Mumbai "Energium". The theme was energy-efficient buildings.

Is PCRA doing anything to check the wastage of petrol/diesel by vehicles every day?

The transport sector accounts for almost 50% of the country's total petroleum products consumption, so PCRA has set up model depots in several Government transport undertakings, where it has been proved that it is possible to save about 20% of the diesel as well as petrol consumption in normal vehicles. Since there are more vehicles in Delhi than other metros, the capital city provides ample scope for conservation both at personal and commercial levels with the help of good traffic management.

In Delhi, we have started installing various digital electronic countdown timers at various traffic intersections in collaboration with DTP. I'm so happy to say that PCRA has already sponsored timers at about 20 intersections. There are more than 600 traffic Intersection points in Delhi where there are signals. This reminds the drivers to switch off their engines in time so as to avoid wastage of oil.

Moreover, the training programmes for groups of drivers in major transport fleets have been very successful and have helped the drivers to develop good driving habits and maintenance practices. These programmes have been very beneficial in promoting and propagating fuel conservation.

One of the best ways to be in touch with the masses is through electronic media. Have you made any endeavours in this sector?

We are carrying out a number of activities like production of and cassettes, production of TV and radio programmes.

Our 1-hour radio programme, *Boond Boond Ki Baat*, on issues concerning energy conservation, has successfully completed 100 episodes. It has got such a tremendous response that it is now being translated into 7 other regional languages.

Our half an hour TV quiz show on conservation, *Khel Khel Mein Badlo Duniya* in which, schools, from all over India, participate is specifically meant for our country's youth and children. We aim at awaking them up

so that they bring an attitudinal change in them. If we succeed in our endeavours then there is a ray of hope... that there will be an overall awakening in the masses. The youth of today are the country's future and they are full of energy. Hence we are hopeful that they will be successful in making the people aware of the importance of overall conservation of the environment.

What is the response?

This quiz show has become very popular. It has been more than a year since it has been successfully telecast. People are motivated to start community efforts to conserve oil and electricity.

Tell something about the achievements and ongoing projects of PCRA.

Recently, we launched an interesting programme in Orissa. Our objective was to conserve water and energy in working women's hostels. For that we sponsored 10 washing machines to 10 working women hostels to be operated only by the physically handicapped women.

The endeavour was, in a way, to give employment to these women in order to make them confident and self-reliant. It has worked very successfully in last 6 months.

Moreover, we have urban energy management programmes and solid waste management programmes.

We are laying emphasis on solid waste management programmes in Delhi and Noida.

For this, we are enlisting the support of Residents' Welfare Associations to use biodegraded kitchen waste in the *gamalas* in the house and segregate the paper and plastic waste. You cannot reduce the *kachras* being generated in your house but can reduce the *kachras* going out of your house. To ensure this, we conduct training programmes with the MCD.

What is the response?

(Smiles) Tremendous!

PCRA is carrying out a number of conservation activities in various sectors, how much has been saved from these efforts?

We have been able to save Rs 250-300 crore per year. In 5-7 years, we have saved Rs 2,000-2,500 crore.

Any other special projects in the near future?

Look, we have many ideas. In our country, maintenance staff don't have sufficient skills. As a matter of policy, we're trying to introduce skill-building programmes.

We are making vocational films which will be quite beneficial for giving training to the people, especially those who couldn't seek admission in good technical institutions or professional colleges, the school or college drop-outs and child labourers for introspection — what they lack, how they can improve their skills to attain success in getting better jobs, etc. These films will guide them, and open door for better opportunities. This is my dream.

We want to reach each and every sector in order to awaken the people in all the strata of society, making them realise the importance of oil conservation, and protect the environment before it's too late.

In a way, here is an opportunity to improve society through the mission undertaken by PCRA.

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