

# Imagine a World...

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Let me tell you a story. In the early 1950s, the Dayak people in Borneo had malaria. The World Health Organization had a solution: spray DDT. They did; mosquitoes died; malaria declined; so far, so good. But there were side-effects. House roofs started falling down on people's heads, because the DDT also killed tiny parasitic wasps that had previously controlled thatch-eating caterpillars. The colonial government gave people sheet-metal roofs, but the noise of the tropical rain on the tin roofs kept people awake. Meanwhile, the DDT-poisoned bugs were eaten by geckoes, which were eaten by cats. The DDT built up in the food chain and killed the cats. Without the cats, the rats flourished and multiplied. Soon the World Health Organization was threatened with potential outbreaks of typhus and plague, and had to call in RAF Singapore to conduct Operation Cat Drop—parachuting a great many live cats into Borneo.

This story—our guiding parable at Rocky Mountain Institute—shows that if you don't understand how things are connected, often the cause of problems is solutions. *Most* of today's problems are like that. But at RMI we harness hidden connections so the cause of *solutions* is solutions: we solve, or better still avoid, not just one problem but many, without making new ones, before someone has to go parachuting more cats. So join me in envisioning where these linked, multiplying solutions can lead if we take responsibility for creating the world we want.

Imagine a world, a few short generations hence, where spacious, peppy, ultrasafe, 120- to 200-mpg cars whisper through revitalized cities and towns, convivial suburbs, and fertile, prosperous countryside, burning *no* oil and emitting pure drinking water—or nothing; where sprawl is no longer mandated or subsidized, so stronger families eat better food on front porches and more kids play in thriving neighborhoods; where new buildings and plugged-in parked cars produce enough surplus energy to power the now-efficient old buildings; and where buildings make people healthier, happier, and more productive, creating delight when entered, serenity when occupied, and regret when departed.

Imagine a world where oil and coal are nearly phased out and nuclear energy has disappeared, all vanquished by the competitors whose lower costs, risks, and delays have already enabled them to capture most of the world's market for new electrical services—energy efficiency, distributed renewables, combined-heat-and-power—and by advanced biofuels that use no cropland and move carbon from air to topsoil; where resilient, right-sized energy systems make major failures impossible, not inevitable; where collapsing oil demand and price has defunded enemies, undermined dictatorship and corruption, and doused the Mideast tinderbox; where energy policy is no longer a gloomy multiple-choice test—do you prefer to die from (a) climate change, (b) oil wars, or (c) nuclear holocaust? We choose (d) *none* of the above.

Imagine, therefore, a world where carbon emissions have long been steadily declining—at a handsome profit, because saving fuel costs less than buying fuel; where global climate has stabilized and repair has begun; and where this planetary near-death experience has finally made antisocial and unacceptable the arrogance that let cleverness imperil the whole human prospect by outrunning wisdom.

Imagine a world where the successful industries, rather than wasting 99.98% of their materials, follow Ray Anderson's lead: they take nothing, waste nothing, and do no harm; where the cost of waste is driving *unnatural* capitalism extinct; where service providers *and* their customers prosper by doing more and better with less for longer, so products become ever more efficient to make and to use; where integrative engineering and biomimicry create abundance by design; and where elegant frugality turns scarcities and conflicts in energy, water, land, and minerals into enough, for all, for ever.

