

May 9, 2008

World's longest sea bridge

According to a May 1 article for *BBC News* online, China celebrated the opening of what is now the world's longest sea bridge. Work began on the 22.5 mile-long bridge in 2003, with costs totaling 11.8 billion Yuan (US\$1.7 billion). The structure links Shanghai to the port city of Ningbo. Built to regulate traffic congestion in the region, the bridge will cut driving time between the two cities in half.

Going solar

On May 1, *Technology Review* reported that solar electricity might soon become much cheaper. Solar power costs nearly three times more than conventional energy sources and uses crystalline silicon as the active material. An increase in production will soon take place and the amount of silicon could grow from 15,000 tons to 123,000 tons by 2010. This will result in a sharp decrease in solar panel prices—making solar energy more affordable.

New employees: expect lower wages

If you're currently a job seeker, don't expect to get paid your dream salary. In fact, many new employees are settling for positions with lower salaries. On May 5, *Jobfox* released details of a recent decrease in salaries. According to the report, the economy is forcing job seekers to lower their expectations. Some salary ranges have dropped by US\$10,000. The fields affected by these salary decreases include software design and development, project management, finance and government positions. Maybe it's now time to pick the best job over the best salary.

Plug it in

What if all you had to do was plug in your car at the end of the night? Well according to the May 2 issue of *The Wall Street Journal*, this may be the newest generation of hybrid vehicles. The plug-in electric car could run 10 to 40 miles on electric batteries before switching to the gas engine. To recharge the battery, just plug it into your everyday electricity outlet. This increases the need for readily available electricity—similarly to the need for a gas station when you're almost at empty—and could force utility companies to either buy or make more electricity or build new power plants altogether.

Survey finds hospitals unprepared for large-scale disasters

A May 6 article in *USA Today* reported that hospital trauma centers in seven major U.S. cities are lacking the capacity to handle a terrorist attack. Thirty-four hospitals in New York City, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Denver and Minneapolis were surveyed. Many of the hospitals did not have the adequate space needed to treat a large number of people in the emergency room at once. Few beds

were available in the intensive care units and even fewer regular beds were available for those with less serious injuries. Some contingency plans established by certain cities are not enough during a catastrophic event; not one city is prepared for a large disaster.

Making the green transition

In an April 30 article, *CNN.com* discussed a new phenomenon called the “transition initiative.” This movement encourages cities around the world to work toward a carbon-free environment—taking steps to be less energy-dependent. Totnes, England was the first to implement this initiative about a year-and-a-half ago. Since then, 50 other towns in the U.K. have joined the movement, as well as cities in Australia and New Zealand. Some say that the world has used nearly half of all oil reserves. Despite alternative energy sources, cutting down on energy usage seems to be a must. Various initiatives are being encouraged throughout these “transition towns” such as step-by-step plans to avoid reliance on carbon fuels, planting trees for emergency food and establishing locally-run energy and construction companies. Many look at this notion of localism as a step back in time. But to the people involved in the movement, planning for the future is crucial.

Commuters switch to public transportation

According to a May 5 article in *Business Week*, more employees throughout the U.S. are switching from cars to company-subsidized transportation. Sky-high gas prices have pushed more people to sign up for these services. According to transportation experts, ridership has increased 40 percent in the past year. Public transportation companies have been trying to break people's car habits for years and are pleased with the current trend. With demands so high, some companies are having a tough time keeping up—even Microsoft began a shuttle service last fall.

Paper or plastic?

You've probably heard this question many times at the grocery store, but what's your response? An article in the May 12 issue of *FORTUNE* magazine described how in the United States alone, the plastic bag industry is worth US\$4 billion. Believe it or not, Americans use more than 100 billion plastic bags every year. To combat this growing problem, 28 U.S. cities have proposed laws restricting plastic bag usage. Some have taxed their plastic bags at 25 cents per bag. While the U.S. isn't quite there yet, countries including Bangladesh and Taiwan have gone as far as banning plastic bags altogether. The next time you visit the supermarket, see if the store offers reusable bag options—Kroger and Wal-Mart do.