

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WORLD WITHOUT OIL:
The Collaborative Alternate Reality Event
Created a “Life-Changing” Vision
of a Possible Future**

*From April 30 - June 1, 2007,
the serious game for the public good
simulated the first 32 weeks of a global oil shock*

*Event archive is online at www.worldwithoutoil.org
Learning space being created*

(San Francisco—July 12, 2007)—At the end of the 32nd week of the global oil shock, things were looking up. Gasoline prices stabilized in the U.S. – at around \$5.60 a gallon, down from a high over \$7. Companies were starting to hire again – but more than 2 million people had lost their jobs. Cities were beginning to address more than \$1 billion in damage from riots and civil disorder. And in some of the FEMA camps set up outside metro areas, handfuls of people were leaving agricultural work to return home. But among the citizen-journalists chronicling the crisis at www.worldwithoutoil.org, the watchword was caution. “It should be clear of all of us,” warned Blueski, a blogger in America’s heartland, “that this is just a taste of what is to come.”

Produced by the design team at Writerguy, **WORLD WITHOUT OIL** leveraged the power of people connected by the Internet to imagine the actual events of an oil shortage, document them and innovate solutions. As the event concluded, the grassroots website at www.worldwithoutoil.org had captured a vivid and visceral picture of what our next oil shock might look like, in the form of 1,500 blog pages, videos, images and audio clips documenting the crisis. “We provided the narrative skeleton,” WWO Creative Director Ken Eklund said. “The players fleshed out the story of this alternate reality game.”

In true Web 2.0 style, the creative expressions can be found on YouTube, Flickr, LiveVideo, Blogger, iTunes, and other sites all over the Internet (tag: *worldwithoutoil*). Approximately 60,000 visitors followed the game’s events, and over 1,800 people signed on to participate, representing every major U.S. metro area and region as well as Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Iraq, the Netherlands, Holland, Brazil, Poland, Norway and Venezuela. One index of its reach: a Google search for the phrase “world without oil” returns over 100,000 pertinent results. Besides creating a rich documentary of an oil shock, **WORLD WITHOUT OIL** became a forum for citizens to share life-changing ideas that transport seamlessly into real life.

“Our game structure gives people ‘permission’ to think seriously about a future they might otherwise avoid thinking about at all,” says Eklund. As a result of the game, people are thinking about their neighbors and communities in new ways, and planting gardens, going to farmer’s markets, using bicycles and transit and otherwise questioning their dependence on cheap, plentiful oil.

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“Usually gaming takes time away from accomplishing useful things in real life,” a player nicknamed Ironmonkey wrote, “but WWO taught me a lot, lowered my electric bill, and got me focused on doing things that matter to me.” Player FallingIntoSin wrote, “I had high hopes for this event, but I never dreamed it would become the amazing tool for change that it is.” MTalon summed up the outcome for many players: “I’m a different person thanks to WWO.”

WORLD WITHOUT OIL breaks new ground in serious gaming (gaming with a serious purpose). By weaving fact and fiction closely together, and entrusting players with power over the story, the game creates the sort of immersive collaborative engagement that makes for effective learning.

“I can’t tell you how many educators and nonprofit organizers I’ve talked to see this as the next generation’s curriculum,” says [Jane McGonigal](#), participation architect for the game. McGonigal will be delivering a keynote address on **WORLD WITHOUT OIL** at the Energy Innovation Conference in August.

Entertainment decision makers are taking note as well: “I thought WORLD WITHOUT OIL was amazing and groundbreaking. The way it gets a grassroots movement designed to think about important problems and builds it around narrative – inspiring,” said Jesse Alexander, executive producer for the TV show *Heroes*, at the recent Hollywood and Games conference.

Writerguy is building a durable archive of the game at www.worldwithoutoil.org. New visitors can follow links there to experience the event week by week, and special threads will guide them through the amassed material. In September, study guides to help middle and high school teachers incorporate the game into class activities will be available at www.worldwithoutoil.org/teach.

WORLD WITHOUT OIL is produced by [Writerguy](#), and is a joint project of PBS' *Independent Lens* and its Electric Shadows Web-original programming. <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/interactive.html>

About the Game Creators

Ken Eklund, Writerguy and creative director, has been working as a game writer and designer for 20 years. He is credited on over two dozen games as well as many Internet-based educational projects. **Jane McGonigal**, participation architect, is currently the resident game designer at the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto, CA. Previously she was a lead designer at 42 Entertainment, most notably for *I Love Bees*, an award-winning alternate reality game. In Fall 2006 MIT Technology Review named McGonigal one of the top 35 innovators changing the world through technology. Along with a Web producer, designer and outreach manager, the Writerguy team includes some of alternate reality gaming’s most experienced “puppetmasters”: **Dee Cook**, **Michelle Senderhauf**, **Marie Lamb**, and **Krystyn Wells**.

Electric Shadows and *Independent Lens* Web-Exclusives

Independent Lens on PBS presents interactive features throughout the series website at pbs.org and is proud to be a portal to Electric Shadows projects which feature the unflinching visions of independent media makers via the Web. These award-winning Web-originals invite visitors to interact through non-linear storytelling and social issue games created by independent media makers. Presented by *Independent Lens* and [ITVS](#) Interactive and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Electric Shadows sites explore the arts, culture and society through innovative forms and meet the ITVS mission of taking creative risks and advancing civic participation. Since its inception in 2002, the Electric Shadows initiative has funded six online projects, which have garnered a People’s Choice Webby Award, two SXSW Web Awards, selection as one of Time.com’s “50 Coolest Websites,” Yahoo! Picks, Cool Site of the Day and numerous other accolades. Explore the projects and learn more about Electric Shadows at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/interactive.html>

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