

Smart reduction in gas consumption

In the transition to more sustainable energy sources, the need for natural gas is declining. However, we can't do without it yet, says Hans Overdiep, Energy Transition manager at GasTerra.

Hans Overdiep: "We are very interested in contributing to a smart and sensible transition to alternative energy sources, together with other stakeholders. It is quite difficult, because sometimes we deal with conflicting interests, but I expect that we will be able to sort out our differences. It is matter of give and take. Ultimately, we all want an affordable, reliable and especially cleaner energy supply."

All-electric

Overdiep expects that most homes will be able to do without natural gas somewhere around the middle of this century. In new housing developments, 'all-electric' is already sufficient, thanks to better insulation and the use of heat pumps. In existing houses, it is not wise to simply turn off the gas supply overnight, says Overdiep.

A better solution is to first insulate the house, and then install a hybrid water pump which can extract heat from the ground or the air. On warm days, this is enough. On colder days, the gas boiler can help out where necessary.

Overdiep: "We call this gas-on-demand: use gas where it has the most value for the energy transition."

For the industry sector, it is 'less easy' to let go of gas, because of the high temperatures needed for certain production processes, and there is a risk that companies will take their business abroad. The transition will take more time here, but even then it may be necessary to keep natural gas on hand for emergency situations, Overdiep expects.

The problem with renewable energy sources is that they are not continuously available and that there are insufficient storage systems.

"Storage is difficult in a country with little differences in height. However, the empty gas fields offer some perspective, so it would be wise for the Netherlands to make use of these more."

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A pioneer in sustainable energy

The Netherlands is not a pioneering country in the use of sustainable energy, such as solar energy, wind energy and biogas. "That should not come as a surprise, because we were always able to extract all the gas we needed from the soil", says Overdiep. He does expect that the Netherlands will take on a lead role 'in the serious and sensible reduction of natural gas'. The knowledge that GasTerra is developing in this area will soon be very useful for surrounding countries.

GasTerra is investing heavily in the development and application of new knowledge, for instance through the Energy Academy Europe and EnTranCe in Groningen. On the island of Ameland, it is participating in an experiment with accelerated transition, together with e.g. the NAM, TNO, Liander, Eneco, the municipality and a local energy cooperative. "We will be making a twenty-year leap in energy transition there, compared to the rest of the Netherlands", says Overdiep. There have been and will be tests looking into the production of green gas from biomass, combined with hydrogen; remote-control water pumps; electrical transport and solar parks. The largest solar park in the Netherlands can be found on Ameland.

"With this practical experience, we can predict what the role of gas will be in ten, twenty or thirty years' time."

Overdiep: "Renewable energy sources will be given priority. This is understandable, and of course we are not against it. But that is no reason to oppose gas. In addition to the fact that it will remain indispensable to a small extent, this relatively clean fossil fuel has brought our

country a lot. Not just comfort, but also cleaner houses. Think about what cities would look like if we had continued burning coal and oil.”

By **Simon Kooistra**

Elsevier (no. 38, September 2016)