There's a lot of moaning and hand-wringing whenever gasoline prices approach $4 a gallon. But all it would take for them to hit $10 a gallon overnight would be hurricanes wiping out a couple of refineries or saboteurs disabling a couple of pipelines, says Dr. R. Paul Williamson, founder and CEO of the non-profit Sustainable Systems of Colorado.

"The United States is still almost completely reliant on finite fossil fuels, which are rapidly being depleted," says Williamson, author of Winning the Energy Wars: A Sustainable Energy Plan for America's Future (www.usa-sep.com). "We should be following a plan now that transitions us to sustainable energy sources but, believe or not, there is no plan."

The country faces oil shortages, international security turmoil and expanding environmental impacts, he says.

"Our entire future hinges on a sustainable energy plan," he says. "A crisis will impact our whole quality of life. It's not just gasoline; petroleum products are used in pharmaceuticals, plastics, things we rely on every day. The time to put together a plan is now – not when we're in crisis."

After studying the details of the nation's looming energy crisis, the former executive director of Hydrogen and Alternative Research and Development for the University of Montana says he's drafted a detailed plan that is systematic, non-threatening and sustainable. Three key features are:

• Abolish the U.S. Department of Energy. Though the 1973 oil crisis led to its creation, the Department of Energy has done nothing to create a sustainable energy plan in its 35 years of existence. Such a strategic plan isn't even a goal. Why? Politics. The big, all-powerful oil companies would not benefit. "To ensure America's security and prosperity'' is the department's stated mission.

• Create a Governors National Sustainable Energy Council. Direct the work of implementing the energy plan to leaders who are already doing that. Thirty of our 50 states have adopted goals for sustainable energy, and some have already achieved them. The council would have

a rotating two-year board consisting of two governors from each of five regions, and three at-large governors. Funding from the decommissioned Department of Energy (currently, $25 to $35 billion a year) would be diverted to the council, which would be located in America's Heartland away from Washington, DC.

• Enact legislation to establish funding. Williamson proposes a National Alternative Energy Bond Fund to provide low-interest loans to new and redirected companies; entrepreneurs and other businesses focused on domestic energy development. This could be funded through sales of Alternative Energy Series “AE” bonds, trading stocks or bonds in the market as part of the Invest in America program, and establishing a surcharge of the use of products that use finite energy resources.

“We have enough domestic finite, transitional and sustainable resources to become energy independent and we can do so if we get focused, establish a new leadership paradigm and implement what I call the ‘USA Sustainable Energy Plan,’ ” Williamson says.

What can Americans do – besides their individual efforts to reduce reliance on gas and oil? Williamson suggests taking these steps:

• Call or email our elected officials. Contact your governor, your U.S. representative, your U.S. senators and the president.

• Tell them you support adopting the USA Sustainable Energy Plan. Ask for their support on the three action steps: decommissioning the Department of Energy, creating the governors’ council, and creating and funding the alternative energy fund.

• Follow up each week. Reiterate the action items and ask what progress is being made.

For more information on the energy plan, visit www.usa-sep.com .

About R. Paul Williamson

R. Paul Williamson is founder and CEO of the non-profit Sustainable Systems of Colorado. He holds bachelor's degrees in secondary education and communications; master's in curriculum and instruction and media technology, and a doctorate in technology education. He has served as a dean at four colleges including the University of Montana, where he created the Montana Hydrogen Futures Project, a plan incorporating the state's human, natural and renewable resources to create a statewide, hydrogen-based economy. Presently, he is working to create a sustainable future for the US; deployment of a self-sustaining, hydrogen-powered, magnetic levitation personal rapid transit monorail system; a sustainable smart home development; and an H2 Futures Business Park.