

A Guide to Greening Your Energy in Ohio

According to the Energy Information Agency, around ninety percent of the electricity generated in Ohio is produced by burning coal. In fact, less than one half of one percent of Ohio's electricity comes from renewable sources. If you're interested in supporting clean or green power, don't let those statistics discourage you. Everyone in the state has the opportunity to support green energy. Depending on where you live, you might even have a choice of ways to do that.



by Stjepan Vlahovich

Of course, the most straightforward way to have green energy is to produce it yourself. However, most of us are not able to do that. The options available to us are to purchase green power from a utility company, to participate in renewable energy contribution programs, or to purchase renewable energy certificates or green tags.

Green Pricing Programs

One of the expectations when Ohio restructured its electric industry and allowed for competition was that green pricing programs might be offered by investor-owned utility companies or their new competitors. Thus far that has not happened. In fact, it is municipal electric systems and their association, American Municipal Power-Ohio (AMP Ohio), that have led the way in developing and offering green power in the state in spite of the fact that municipal electric systems are not covered by Ohio's electric restructuring law.

The City of Bowling Green was the first municipal system to offer green power to its customers. In the winter of 2003, AMP-Ohio announced it had selected the Green Mountain Energy Company to offer renewable energy to its member municipal electric systems under the Nature's Energy ® brand. Nature's Energy ® electricity is produced from wind or hydropower.

In February of 2004, the City of Cuyahoga Falls became the first AMP-Ohio community to offer Nature's Energy ® to its customers. More than two hundred residential customers in the Cuyahoga Falls are purchasing Nature's Energy ®. Those customers pay 1.3 cents per kilowatt-hour more than the standard electric rate. For an average residential electric user this adds between \$8.00 and \$10.00 per month to their electric bill. Several other AMP-Ohio communities, including Bowling Green, are about to begin offering Nature's Energy ® to their customers.

Contribution Programs

Contribution programs are ones that offer consumers the opportunity to support renewable energy development without actually providing green power to the customer in return for that contribution. The City of Bowling Green began its wind turbine project with a contribution program. Its success is tangible. It can be seen in rural Wood County: the first utility-scale wind farm in Ohio. There are now four wind turbines producing power at that site.



Ohio Department of Development

Office of Energy Efficiency

Renewable Energy Certificates or Green Tags

The way that all Ohioans can support the development of renewable energy is by purchasing renewable energy certificates. Although this avenue open to all, it's probably the method that's most difficult to understand.

Here is how it works. The unique or green attributes of renewable energy have a value for companies and individuals because they emit less carbon dioxide, less sulfur dioxide, less mercury, and less particulate matter than coal-fired generation of electricity. In some instances the value of those attributes is sold to consumers separately from the actual electricity. When that is done, those attributes are called renewable energy certificates (RECs). RECs are also sometimes known as tradable renewable certificates (TRCs) or green tags. (Once the attributes are sold as RECs, the actual electricity is no longer green power.)

RECs allow everyone to contribute to the development of cleaner energy, no matter where they live and whether or not green power is produced nearby. Marketers and brokers around the country, including SOAR Energy in Columbus, sell RECs. Information about SOAR energy RECs can be found at <http://www.soarenergy.org/>.

By purchasing RECs you are ensuring that even if the electricity coming into your home is not green, you are still supporting the development of renewable energy. Although up to now most REC purchases have been made by companies, educational institutions, and governments, individuals are free to buy them as well. They can even be purchased for special events such as meetings and conferences.

How Can I Be Sure?

We don't see the electricity that comes into our home and we don't see what gives those green tags we buy their color. How can we know, then, that we are actually getting what we are paying for? There are certification programs available that make certain that the claims being made for green power and RECs are true.

The largest of these is the Green-e Renewable Energy Certification Program sponsored and managed by the Center for Resource Solutions. The Green-e program certifies both green power products and RECs. The Green-e Program works with electricity producers, environmental groups and other stakeholders to develop appropriate standards in individual states and regions. Standards for renewable energy products have been developed for Ohio through the Green-e Program. Those standards spell out the type, amount, and percent of new renewable energy that a product must include in order to use the Green-e logo. There is an annual verification audit to ensure that the product actually meets the established standards. To learn more, visit www.green-e.org/.

Where Can I Find Out More?

The U.S. Department of Energy's Green Power Network website provides information on a wide range of topics related to green power. The *Guide to Purchasing Green Power* found on the site,



Ohio Department of Development

Office of Energy Efficiency

though designed primarily for businesses, has information that is also helpful to individuals.
www.eere.energy.gov/greenpower/

Also geared towards businesses but useful for individuals is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Green Power Partnership website. www.epa.gov/greenpower/

The Database of State Incentives for Renewable Energy (DSIRE) includes comprehensive state-by-state information about renewable energy regulations and support. www.ies.ncsu.edu/dsire/

The Green Power Group offers guidance to businesses interested in purchasing green power.
www.thegreenpowergroup.org/

Finally, the green power section of Green Energy Ohio's website provides more Ohio specific guidance. www.greenenergyohio.org/page.cfm?pageId=233

Wherever you live in Ohio, you can turn your power green. Who knows? Your neighbors may decide to be more than "green with envy" when you do.

Stjepan Vlahovich is a retired Energy Information Program Manager from Ohio's Office of Energy Efficiency. In his spare time, he is an avid reader and a writer.



Ohio Department of Development

Office of Energy Efficiency