

US Government to Invest in Wind Energy

The US Department of Energy is commencing a new partnership with the country's six largest wind turbine manufacturers, in an effort to advance research, development and building of new wind farms.

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The ultimate goal is to provide 20% of the nation's energy from wind by 2030, a goal the DOE says is within reach. The companies partnering with the government are GE Energy, Siemens Power Generation, Vestas Wind Systems, Clipper Turbine Works, Suzlon Energy, and Gamesa Corporation.

The goal personifies a strategy more often associated with Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, who often talk about enacting new wind energy investments to scale up the industry, creating new jobs and reducing the demand for fossil fuel energy in the process. This policy comes courtesy of the Bush Administration, though.

The partnership includes bettering wind turbine technology, working out where to put turbines so they don't slaughter birds and bats, and developing job training programs.

Wind is the second-fastest growing source of energy, next to natural gas. In 2007, the nation's wind energy capacity grew by more than 40%.

Wind power is the conversion of wind energy into a useful form, such as electricity, using wind turbines. At the end of 2008, worldwide nameplate capacity of wind-powered generators was 121.2 gigawatts (GW). Wind power produces about 1.5% of worldwide electricity use, and is growing rapidly, having doubled in the three years between 2005 and 2008. Several countries have achieved relatively high levels of wind power penetration, such as 19% of stationary electricity production in Denmark, 11% in Spain and Portugal, and seven percent in Germany and the Republic of Ireland in 2008. As of May 2009, eighty countries around the world are using wind power on a commercial basis.

Large-scale wind farms are typically connected to the local electric power transmission network; smaller turbines are used to provide electricity to isolated locations. Utility companies increasingly buy back surplus electricity produced by small domestic turbines. Wind energy as a power source is attractive as an alternative to fossil fuels, because it is plentiful, renewable, widely distributed, clean, and produces no greenhouse gas emissions; however, the construction of wind farms (as with other forms of power generation) is not universally welcomed due to their visual impact and other effects on the environment.