

Rhode Island's Renewable Energy Programs: Overview



Approximately twenty percent of Rhode Island's greenhouse gas emissions come from the generation of the electricity we use. The good news is that Rhode Island has outstanding programs for renewable energy development. As members of the Rhode Island community we should know the basics of these programs, use the programs to their fullest advantage, and vigorously support their continuation and expansion.

More than 99% of Rhode Islanders get our electricity from National Grid, an electricity and natural gas distribution company. Distribution companies are regulated utilities: this means that the state can specify that we want a certain minimum percentage of the electricity that the utility buys, and then sells to us, to come from renewable sources. In Rhode Island, this renewable energy standard has been extended through 2035, so that each year at least 1.5% more of the electricity acquired for use in Rhode Island is to come from renewable resources.

Rhode Island has three programs supporting renewable energy development. The first is for large projects, such as the landfill gas project in Johnston and Block Island's offshore wind project, the first in the nation. This is called a long-term contracting standards program. The other two programs are more familiar and widespread: net metering and distributed generation. They can support the development of the same kinds of renewable energy facilities, but they do it in different ways. We can participate in these programs to reduce our state's fossil fuel emissions.

Generating our electricity locally and in a variety of ways can make our energy supply more secure. It also benefits our state's economy overall, by keeping money spent for energy in Rhode Island rather than shipping it to other places, and keeping Rhode Islanders employed in renewable energy jobs.

We can also encourage the state to add more programs, more policies and more incentives to move toward renewable energy sources for all of our electricity, combined with a strategy that taxes fossil fuel companies for what they sell to Rhode Island. Insisting that all new energy infrastructure in Rhode Island is for renewable energy, not fossil fuels, is another way to encourage renewable energy development and to protect vulnerable communities and the natural world.