

Bright Ideas – Exploring Renewable Energy with Norman Johnson



Norman Johnson of I-R-E

I have always been a pretty GREEN person, with litter being my number one nemesis. After working for 25 years as an electrician, some life changes caused me to re-evaluate how the balance of my career would be spent. During that process, information about renewables, solar in particular, seemed to keep popping up in front of me. News stories, magazine articles and web content started to fuel my curiosity. After catching up with the technical aspects and learning that the industry as a whole was at its very beginnings, interest increased. With a solid electrical construction background, there was a comfort level with how the systems are put together, so in June of 2010 we opened for business as Independence Renewable Energy LLC.

Renewable energy is comprised of five principal sources: solar (known as photovoltaic or PV,) wind, moving water, bio-mass and heat from inside the earth.

These forms of energy are continually replenished, as long as the sun continues to shine. Fossil fuels, such as oil, coal and natural gas are finite sources, which will eventually be depleted or become too expensive or damaging to retrieve.

To begin an adventure into renewable energy, first start by becoming more efficient. The less energy you consume, the more you will increase the value of any renewable energy system. There are fun solar powered toys and cell phone chargers that are great ways to see that the technology really works. An amazing thing about most renewables, solar in particular, is that it's scalable and expandable. Consumers can start with a relatively small system with an eye toward adding on in the future.

Avoid pitfalls by researching and comparing options. In renewable, one size most certainly does not fit all. Quality equipment and proper installation methods are most important. Renewables are now a worldwide industry with components being sourced from all over. Be sure there is a good warranty backed by a manufacturer that has a history, and will be around to honor any issues. Insist on an installer that is qualified. In any large growth industry, you will find companies that "add on" a service in an effort to increase revenues. Renewables are no exception. In many areas, codes are

still catching up to the growth. Look for an installer that is willing to educate, not just sell.

Investigate the tax incentives currently available to homeowners. There is a 30% federal tax credit on the entire installed cost of a system. Illinois has a cyclical rebate program that can reach up to 25% of the installed cost. REC (Renewable Energy Credit) sales are coming to Illinois in 2015. There is a great resource that tracks these programs. Visit www.dsireusa.org, a one-stop, renewable energy incentive website.

The future of renewable energy is limitless! So much of the planet is years ahead of us with implementation of renewables. In our country, the Midwest is lagging behind the coasts, but we are catching up fast. With wind, solar, hydro, bio-mass and more, there are numerous types of renewables, each with a place in our world. Reduce energy costs and your carbon footprint, and make our planet a brighter place. Enough energy from the sun hits the earth in one hour to provide all the world's power for an entire year. The answer to our energy needs is truly over our heads.

For more information, visit with Norman Johnson in the Independence Renewable Energy Booth, #530 or on-line at www.i-r-e.net.

