



# EMC News

May 5, 2004

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## ENERGY COMMITTEE REPORT

*Submitted by Kenny Christianson*

The Energy Committee was busy last month with Earth Day activities. Together with Co-opPlus Energy Cooperative and the Finger Lakes Energy Task Force, we organized an energy conference at Cornell Cooperative Extension on April 24. Speakers included Kenny Christianson on trends in alternative energy, Steve Nicholson on living in a solar home, Mark Darling from Ithaca College on IC's composting program and the Sustainable Tompkins initiative, and John Smigelski from Community Energy on buying wind power. We were able to explore possible avenues for collaboration, especially in the county's potential renewable energy standard, expanding ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection program beyond county operations, and in developing networks for the Department of Energy's Clean Cities Program.

On April 25, an Earth Day Festival was held in and around Dewitt Park. The Energy Committee helped to apply for a grant, which was awarded, to help promote, market and advertise Earth Day activities. The \$500 grant was awarded by Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board to help promote Tompkins County as a center for alternative energy education, research, and development. The grant was used for radio spots in the Binghamton, Cortland and Geneva areas to publicize the energy conference and Earth Day activities. Despite rain and 30-degree temperatures, over 150 people attended the Earth Day Festival, which was moved to the basement of the Presbyterian Church.

The next Energy Committee meeting will be on Monday, May 10 at 4:30 in the Old Jail small conference room.

## HIGHWAY CLEAN UP REPORT

*Submitted by Steve Nicholson*

On Saturday, April 24, five EMC members managed to manage the environment, at least our stretch of Route 13. With ideal

weather conditions, Peter Harriot, Steve Uzman, Joyce Gerbasi, Cindy Seliger, and Steve Nicholson gathered several trash bags apiece. Steve Nicholson found a \$5 bill (Monopoly money) and a coconut. If we had 3 more participants we could have finished the project, but opportunities remain. If you drive by the airport fence you can see where our efforts are lacking. Contact me if you want to form a 2-person team that can eliminate the rest of the winter build-up.

## SIX MILE CREEK VOLUNTEER MONITORING INFORMATIONAL SESSION

May 10, 7:30-9 p.m. at Cooperative Extension, 615 Willow Ave, Ithaca

This session will cover:  
Six Mile Creek - Past, Present & Future  
Water Quality Monitoring Strategies  
How You Can Get Involved

Questions? Call Tania Schusler at 272-2292 or email [tms23@cornell.edu](mailto:tms23@cornell.edu)

## WIND POWER PREMIUMS

*Submitted by Herb Engman*

*This is the response to Herb's question posed at the Wind Power Webcast sponsored by the Local Governmental Environmental Assistance Network:*

*Question:* Why can't the premiums paid for wind energy be treated as venture capital, with refunds made available when wind energy starts to be cost competitive?

*Answer:* There is no reason that premiums can't be treated as venture capital. But, keep in mind that IOUs (independently owned utilities, e.g. any non-muni/non-coop utility) are privately owned businesses where operational decisions are made based on bottom line impacts.

Utilities set the premium for their green pricing programs independently and the premium varies depending on the utility and program. It can be

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assumed that a utility sets the premium based on the unit cost difference between generating green power (the price of which varies considerably depending on the technology) and the cost of generating a unit of their individual baseload capacity. However, that's not always the case. In some states (where the electricity industry is still regulated) the PUC oversees green pricing practices, but in many cases, the predominant utility(ies) in the state need only make a fairly flimsy argument for why they charge the premiums that they do, and the PUC goes along with it. As the cost of wind energy continues to fall, a lot of utilities are continuing to charge the green pricing premium that they set originally, perhaps 5 years ago, even though their unit cost to generate green power has dropped. There is also an element of the market's "willingness to pay" in their consideration - standard open market practice.

However, Austin Energy, a Texas municipal utility is doing exactly what you suggest. The premium in their green pricing program fluctuates on a monthly basis as the difference between the cost of generating wind and their baseload supply (primarily gas) fluctuates, e.g., they charge customers the "actual" premium of wind generation over their baseload. When the cost of gas is more expensive than wind (which has been the case recently), their green power customers actually get a refund on their monthly bill.

I hope that answers your question. Thanks for tuning in to the webcast. (Amy Ellsworth, CH2M Hill, Englewood, CO)

**ENVIRONMENT NOT A PRESSING CONCERN**  
*according to Gallop Poll on environmental issues*  
*Submitted by Heather Filiberto*

Gallup's annual Environment/Earth Day poll, conducted March 8-11, finds Americans fairly critical of the quality of the nation's environment today. By a 57% to 43% margin, more Americans rate current environmental conditions as "only fair" or "poor" than say they are "excellent" or "good." This assessment is slightly more negative than those of two and three years ago. Similarly, by a 58% to 34% margin, more Americans believe the environment is getting worse rather than better.

Despite these negative views of environmental conditions, Gallup finds Americans less concerned about the environment today than they are about several other issues on the national agenda -- particularly healthcare, but also crime,

drug use, terrorism, and the economy. Barely one-third (35%) worry a great deal about the quality of the environment, while 62% worry either a great deal or a fair amount. This puts the environment on par with energy, hunger and homelessness, and unemployment. See the full report at <http://www.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=11380&pg=1>.

**NY INTERFAITH POWER AND LIGHT**  
*Submitted by Christian Nielsen-Palacios*

There's a new organization in New York, whose goal is to make congregations more environmentally responsible. I am in the Board of Directors of New York Interfaith Power and Light. For more information, talk to me, or visit [www.nyipl.org](http://www.nyipl.org)

**LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HONORED FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION EFFORTS**  
*Submitted by Heather Filiberto*

Following are highlights from the EPA's 2004 Climate Protection Award winners:

- **The City of San Diego's Sustainable Community Program** - implementing a Climate Protection Action Plan with the goal of reducing the city's greenhouse gas emissions to 15 percent below 1990 levels by 2010.
- **The City and County of San Francisco** - San Francisco will achieve its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2012 through efficient use of resources and technology upgrades. The city raised \$100 million dollars to finance solar panels, energy efficiency upgrades, and wind turbines for public facilities through a bond initiative that is fully repaid from energy savings.
- **City of Newton, Massachusetts** - The City's efforts to reduce include retrofitting all traffic lights with light emitting diodes, becoming a major wind power purchaser, and improving the energy efficiency of over 30 buildings and schools. In 2003 Mayor David B. Cohen demonstrated his dedication to the environment by creating a director of environmental affairs position, a sustainability committee, and a solar energy coordinator position.

For more information visit  
<http://www.epa.gov/cppd/awards/climproawards.htm>

***See you at the next EMC meeting***  
May 12, 2004 at 7:00pm!