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Wind turbines show how costly ‘free’ energy can be

Most of what the public knows about wind turbines comes from the media.

Without a grounding in the sciences of thermodynamics and economics, the average person, eager to be politically and environmentally correct, fixates on the concept of “free energy,” and closes his mind to further discussion of how expensive “free” can be.

The public believes, more than it really knows, about wind turbines, and well-meaning advocates of wind as the solution to our climate and energy woes are unknowingly on a crash course with reality.

Citizen watchdogs like myself, who dig a little deeper to learn the whole story, come off in the media as deluded malcontents or NIMBYs, though we back up our warnings with statistics, case studies, laws of physics, comparative research and personal testimonies of real people who suffer from proximity to turbines.

Rural dwellers are “asked” to host wind turbines and to pay for transmission lines to furnish city dwellers with green power from wind. Investors make huge profits while taxpayers and ratepayers get to pay 20 percent more for their power. So who is this technology benefiting? For exactly whom is it “free?”

Financially, wind energy is a losing proposition for most everyone who does not directly profit from the manufacture, siting, servicing, removal, financing or taxing of turbines, or from the disbursal of the electricity produced by them.

The wind boon benefits the turbine industry, not the general public. The industry is a terrible waste of resources: Human, physical, financial, temporal and aesthetic. These finite resources could be better spent transforming the physical infrastructure of our society toward sustainable energy production and use, and toward creating jobs that benefit the entire society.

Is it wise to be placing most of our renewable eggs in a basket that seems to be bottomless?

America may not be able to make cars competitively anymore, but turbines? Subsidized and backed by the government? We could literally cover the countryside with turbines. And to be sure, we will, unless we start talking about who (besides Mother Nature) is paying for them and how.

Wind turbines: Warm, fuzzy and politically correct. On-site solar energy, just as renewable and with far fewer negative consequences: Little press, and no federal stimulus money.

There are plenty of good health and safety reasons to zone huge commercial turbines away from residences, but the primary objections to wind turbines should be:

- 1) They don’t do what they’re supposed to do, i.e., replace energy generated by fossil fuels; in fact, they encourage more coal plants to be built. Because the power they produce can’t be stored, traditional sources of electricity must remain available to back up the turbines when the wind dies down.

2) Turbine manufacture, siting, operation and their transmission networks are environmental threats, not boons. We would be better off taking the land on which they are sited — plus the energy used and the lands mined to build them, the land used to transmit the energy they produce, and the money spent on investment incentives — and devoting all those resources to planting trees that would sequester carbon, and simply forgo the huge hidden carbon footprint associated with turbines.

3) Turbine technology looks suspiciously like a bailout of the heavy equipment manufacturing industry, and a transfer of taxpayer and ratepayer resources into the hands of investors.

4) In harnessing the wind we are destroying the beauty of local landscapes — worldwide — with mesmerizing icons of technology that distract our consciousness and ignore our need for a natural landscape.

Red flags should go up when we find the Sierra Club and General Electric Corp. coming down on the same side of an issue.

Opinions of genuine environmental advocacy get scant or severely edited coverage, making room for more politically correct positions. What we end up with, rather than information, is misleading public relations campaigns, doublespeak and pep talks for progress.

It's time we stopped fooling ourselves into thinking that wind turbines are going to save us. We truly cannot afford the resources it would require to seriously make a difference in our energy supply, and there are much greener and more sustainable approaches to caring for our environment.

The false hopes generated by the wind energy industry are giving us the idea that we don't have to change our lifestyles; technology will allow us to continue to be gluttons of energy and resources.

Sorry to be the messenger of bad news, but as good as they may be for the economy, commercial wind turbines can never be green. I don't care how much spin we put on them.

By Ron Reimer

Ronald Reimer is an organic farmer in Ettrick, Wis.

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