

# Excuses...

## *Unreal Roadblocks to Renewable Energy*

Ian Woofenden

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*Derivation: "Excuse" is from Latin excusare, cause, explanation.*

I meet many people who are new to the idea of renewable energy (RE) and, in talking with them, hear a lot of excuses for not going for it. Their justifications run the gamut from technical, social, and aesthetic reasons, to just plain ludicrous ones. Here's a sampling:

**RE systems "don't work."** This one is easy for me to refute, since I've been depending on renewable energy systems for my family's electricity for more than 20 years. But it's good to ask and listen, to find out what second-rate experiences folks have had, and let them know that past failures don't mean that present-day RE systems don't work. Of course, reading *Home Power* is a good antidote for this excuse, since we profile first-class, working systems in every issue.

**RE systems aren't efficient enough.** Efficiency is somewhat of a red herring with solar and wind energy systems, since the fuel is free and readily available. With PV systems, for instance, efficiency simply relates to how much space the array will require. This is much less important than the cost of the delivered energy. Improving efficiency comes at a cost, so unless efficiency gains come with cost reductions, I'll choose the lowest cost per delivered watt-hour, unless space is at a premium.

**RE systems are too expensive.** While the cost of a system can be relatively easy to get a handle on, estimating its true value and impact can be more elusive to quantify. It's curious to me that although we base *very* few decisions in our lives solely on economics, energy devices tend to be held to this standard exclusively. We don't buy food, clothing, furniture, or vehicles on their economy alone, but rather on their complete value, which may include health, comfort, and aesthetic preferences, among others. Our energy decisions should be no different—we should consider the environmental and social consequences, the subsidies propping up dirty energy technologies, and what legacy we're leaving our kids and grandkids.

**My house isn't ready.** Practical objections often center on waiting until a home's roofing is ready to replace or has been replaced. But modern racking options allow



easy removal and replacement of PV modules when it's time to replace the roofing. Pole and ground mounts are also options that should be considered and, depending on your site, can be the best choices. Other objections have to do with the load-bearing capability of the roof to support solar hot water collectors or the strength of floor framing for supporting batteries. While these may be real issues, they are not deal-breakers, merely projects to be tackled in preparation for system installation.

**Wind turbines are too much trouble.** This excuse includes objections about sound, vibration, tower height, and birds. While using wind energy does take considerable care and involvement, all of these objections can be dealt with through proper siting and design. More outlandish excuses include assertions that wind generators scare away the worms in the ground around the tower, cause epilepsy, and interfere with the communications systems that protect our homeland security. Of course, perhaps folks with these fears *should* avoid wind energy...

**RE systems are ugly.** These folks wish that PV modules came in just the right color to match their home's trim. Or they think that wind turbines and towers clutter a landscape. Even some homeowners' association bylaws prohibit certain solar energy equipment on "aesthetic grounds." A Latin aphorism states, "De gustibus non disputandum est"—there's no accounting for taste.

My taste runs toward pollution-free energy that's democratically distributed to everyone on the planet—that seems truly beautiful to me. I think we need to continue to brag up solar energy systems as beautiful, while at the same time focusing on new, more aesthetic installation options. And it doesn't hurt to mention the ugliness of nonrenewable energy plants—not only their present ugliness, but the ugliness of their long-term effects on our health, society, and environment.

**The bureaucracy makes it difficult to use RE systems.** This can refer to punitive local regulations or uncooperative utilities. Or it can be the lack of incentives and subsidies that is used as an excuse. Whatever the hurdles, we've seen over and over again that committed and determined people can overcome them. And after the first person in an area perseveres, it's easier for everyone who follows.

**RE systems are dangerous.** "They can kill utility linemen." Not true! "You can get electrocuted or burned." True of many household systems, RE or not—but only if they are improperly installed or used. "Batteries give off dangerous gasses." True, but the precautions are straightforward.

Other such excuses crop up now and then. The big picture is that modern RE systems, installed and used in safe, code-compliant ways, are just as safe as your car, furnace, or office equipment—things you use every day.

**There's not enough sun where I live.** I hear this a lot because I live in the "cloudy" Northwest. Although we do get cloudy weather in the winter, we get lots of sun in the other seasons. And with annualized net metering, we can sell our surplus solar energy to the utility all summer, and

use the credit when it gets cloudy. Sure, Arizona gets more sun than we do, but not ten, five, or even twice as much as most places. It's worth capturing the renewable resources available to you, and few places truly have "not enough sun."

*No More Excuses*

Sometimes I think there's some pathology afoot when I see the lengths people will go to talk themselves into *not* doing anything with renewable energy. But perhaps it's just a human resistance to change. An acquaintance involved in substance abuse education says that many addicts will choose jail over rehabilitation because they are familiar with jail, while rehab is new and unfamiliar to them.

So if you're on the fence about renewable energy, get yourself familiar with the reality of these amazing technologies. Change isn't so hard when you know why you need to change, how to change, and that change will make your life better!

*Access*

Ian Woofenden, PO Box 1001, Anacortes, WA 98221 • ian.woofenden@homepower.com

For more discussion of these and other excuses, see "Clearing the Air: *Home Power* Dispels the Top RE Myths" in *HP100*.

Heard any outrageous RE excuses? Send them to me, and you may see them in print.



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