

Free Energy

Not Pie on the Plate

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Derivation: From Old English freon, to set free, and Greek energos, active.

"There ain't no such thing as a free lunch" (TANSTAAFL) is a good phrase to live by, and a good way to look at energy, too. But over the years, countless people have held onto the dream of "free energy."

It's a nice dream. It would certainly make our lives easier if the energy we use didn't come with a price. But so far, everyone I know is still paying for gas for their vehicles, electricity for their appliances, and fuel to heat their homes.

Of course, renewable energy can be considered "free," but only once you pay for it. The equipment to harvest the renewable energy found in sunshine, wind, and falling water costs money, and so does maintaining the systems. You can pay for it up front, and it's a great deal, but it's not "free."

"Free energy" advocates generally aren't referring to photovoltaic (PV) panels or wind generators. They talk about energy from magnets, energy from space, and energy from black boxes that are too secret for us to get a look into. Windmills that blow wind to make themselves go, waterwheels that recycle the water, and other perpetual motion machines have been talked about for centuries. There have been claims of machines that run on gravity, water, air, or ammonia; vortex energy machines; and even little green pills that turn water into gasoline.

I'm a skeptic and a realist. My job asks me to look critically at text, and my conscience asks me to carefully examine claims about any new energy-producing device.

At the same time, I try to remain open to new ideas. PVs once were new, and folks were skeptical about them then—some still remain skeptical today. We have to find a balance between skepticism and openness. Just don't be so open-minded that your brains fall out.

The promoters of free-energy devices must prove themselves. I can't see spending much time with it until they do. When a real, viable technology comes along, you'll be able to buy it. In the meantime, if you want to try to sort the wheat from the chaff, here's an edited version of science maven Bill Beaty's list (www.amasci.com) of things to consider when looking at "free energy" schemes.

So how can you tell a "free energy" (FE) scam from a legitimate technology? Here are some symptoms of a scam:

- *The company wants your money. It wants investors to buy stock, it wants to sell "dealerships," it wants individuals to*

make large "donations," or sometimes it wants to sell you high-priced books or extremely expensive plans. In any scam, the whole point is to separate the victims from their wallets.

- *The invention is unproven, and has not been publicized in the mainstream press.*
- *Either the inventor keeps the device secret, or the patent lacks some critical information, and nobody can build a working copy based on the patent.*
- *The company shows no interest in demonstrating that the invention works. Scammers will give you all sorts of reasonable-sounding excuses for not providing evidence that their discovery is real. Honest companies will prove their claims beyond any doubt before soliciting investors.*
- *The company performs public demonstrations, but something always goes wrong.*
- *The inventor doesn't publish peer-reviewed scientific research papers.*
- *The inventor uses conspiracies/suppression as an excuse for the technology's lack of development and success.*
- *The inventor doesn't give out working copies of the invention to independent labs for testing—the hardware stays secret and untested.*
- *The invention violates current laws of science. (Well, that's OK, since historical inventions often violated contemporary science of their time. But if many other listed symptoms are present as well, then it's probably a scam.)*
- *The inventor hasn't tried winning any of the FE device prizes. Back in the days of flying machines, the genuine inventors were all questing after several major prizes. They didn't disdain the prizes and make excuses. But scammers sure do!*

Ask FE hobbyists. They'll quickly set you straight about who is a rip-off artist and who is a legitimate experimenter or inventor.

I'll be first in line to purchase new, clean-energy technologies that actually work. But I'll remain skeptical of all schemes and scams that aren't functioning products for sale, or at least ready to be tested in independent circumstances. Until then, these free-energy dreams are just more pie in the sky. And as HP publisher Richard Perez says, "We report only about pie on the plate..."

Access

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