

Now You Can Support Renewable Energy in Falls Church!

By Mia Musolino



You might have heard that electric companies in some regions are now offering customers the option of specifying renewable energy generation for their homes, businesses, or public buildings.

After doing some research, I wanted to find out what was available for Falls Church area residents. This page summarizes what I found and tells you how to sign on to an important new project in Falls Church that will allow us to help the region end its dependence on non-renewable, dirty energy sources.

Wind Farm at Mill Run, PA (Photo: Community Energy)

Our area electricity provider, Dominion Virginia Power, uses coal, natural gas, and/or nuclear energy to generate our electricity, which contribute to a host of long-term environmental problems. Wind power is a growing source of electricity for many areas of the country. Although it costs more per kilowatt hour than electricity generated through traditional means, the cost is dropping as more wind farms are created and more customers demand renewable energy for their homes, businesses, and municipal buildings.

What Are the Benefits of Wind Power?

The benefits of wind power versus traditionally generated power are tremendous. In the Washington Metropolitan area, the area's oldest power plants contribute to an increased number of asthma attacks, other respiratory illnesses, and even premature deaths. Harvard researchers concluded in 2002 that Washington Metropolitan area power plants were responsible for, among other things, at least 20,000 asthma attacks; 4,000 emergency room visits; and 300 hospitalizations. In addition, it is estimated that the degraded air quality produced by these power plants cause 250 premature deaths per year. *And these figures do not even account for all of the other old, coal-fired power plants out of our immediate area that send polluted air downwind to us every day.*

Fortunately, wind energy is becoming increasingly available in the Mid-Atlantic region to replace the power produced by the power plants that are making us and our families sick. Here are some statistics about Community Energy's Mountaineer Wind Energy Center in West Virginia, the largest wind farm East of the Mississippi River:

Each of the forty-four 1.5-megawatt turbines is 220 feet tall, with 115-foot blades... Compared to the average electric generation in the Mid-Atlantic, the Mountaineer Wind Energy Center will offset approximately 200 million pounds of air pollution annually. This is the carbon dioxide equivalent of planting over 14 million trees or taking almost 29,000 cars off the road.

-Community Energy press release

What Are Our Renewable Energy Choices in Falls Church?

Dominion Virginia Power does not yet offer a renewable energy option to its Virginia customers. But we can buy what are called "renewable energy certificates" (also called "green tags") from one of several organizations that sell them. My family buys them from NewWindEnergy? / Community Energy, a Pennsylvania wind power company that generates wind energy for the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. These renewable energy certificates, available in blocks of 100 kilowatt hours, allow you to buy wind power generated on a Mid-Atlantic wind farm to displace an equal amount of traditionally generated electricity on our electric grid. By replacing the equal amount of electricity that would be generated by conventional

sources, each windmill prevents the annual release of nearly *5 million pounds of air pollutants* that contribute to global warming, smog, and acid rain.

Each 100-kwh block costs \$2.50 per month, and there is a 2-block minimum per month. You can choose to support wind power for part or all of the electricity needed to run your home. The cost of each certificate represents the premium needed to generate wind energy compared to conventional electricity. The rest of the generation cost is recovered from sale of the wind-generated electricity to the wholesale electric grid. Purchasers of NewWindEnergy? receive a certificate each year of the amount of wind energy delivered to their electric grid, verified and tracked under the industry [Green-e standard](http://www.green-e.org) (<http://www.green-e.org>).

NewWindEnergy? says that the average home uses about 600 kwh per month. After an analysis of our electric bill, I found that our house was about average; this means that our family can support wind energy for 100 percent of our electricity by signing up for 6 certificates per month, for \$15.00 per month. Alternatively, we could support 50 percent wind power for half that cost, 25 percent for a quarter of that cost, and so on. Our family chose to support 100 percent wind power through the purchase of 6 certificates per month.

Help us “Adopt a Windmill” in Falls Church!

There is an exciting new program that NewWindEnergy? is offering through which an organization, area, or civic group can “adopt a windmill”. About 500 homes supporting 100 percent wind power is required for adoption, and a group can take as long as they want to attain the goal of full windmill support. Even adopting half or a quarter of a windmill makes a real difference in the amount of “dirty” power being generated in the Mid-Atlantic region. NewWindEnergy? then tracks the progress of each campaign and when an organization attains the goal of windmill adoption (or even attains some smaller interim goal), there can be some local or regional publicity for the effort.

Falls Church could make a huge difference by supporting the wind power equivalent of planting 318,000 trees per year or taking 659 cars off the road! (These are the benefits of one windmill, extrapolated from the statistics for 44 windmills in the quote from the Community Energy press release above). To get the maximum benefit of this program in the region, *anyone with a Falls Church mailing address should consider signing up for certificates* -- not just those who live within the City of Falls Church limits. After we reach the goal of 500 homes, we will also be able to demonstrate to Dominion Virginia Power that there is, indeed, a market for clean, healthy, renewable energy in this area!

Rather than try to explain more details here of how renewable energy certificates work, I've provided the references to all the information you need about what the certificates are, how they work, and how you sign up for them. When you sign up, make sure you specify that you want your purchase associated with the “**Falls Church, VA**” Adopt-a-Windmill campaign!

Where Can I Get Information and/or Sign Up?

- ? www.newwindenergy.com - NewWindEnergy? (a product of Community Energy) website. Here, learn about the benefits of wind power, where wind farms are located in the mid-Atlantic region, read frequently asked questions about wind power and renewable energy certificates, and purchase monthly certificates online. Be sure to specify the “Falls Church, VA”, Adopt-a-Windmill Campaign! You can also sign up for monthly wind power certificates or get additional information by calling **1-866-WIND-123**.
- ? <http://www.eere.energy.gov/greenpower/markets/certificates.shtml?page=0>. - Green Power Network Renewable Energy Certificates page.
- ? <http://www.nwf.org/nationalwildlife/article.cfm?articleId=847&issueId=64&passthrough=newsletter> – National Wildlife Federation article on Wind Energy
- ? <http://www.awea.org> – American Wind Energy Association

If you have additional questions about information in this article, please contact me at mia_musolino@yahoo.com or 703.533.3423. To learn more about the environment in Falls Church, go to www.fallschurchenvironment.org.