

SUN DAY CAMPAIGN

(a campaign for a sustainable energy future)

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News Advisory

SECOND YEAR IN A ROW: NEW RENEWABLE ELECTRICAL CAPACITY EXCEEDS THAT FROM GAS, COAL, OIL, AND NUCLEAR COMBINED

RENEWABLE SOURCES NOW ALMOST ONE-FIFTH OF THE NATION'S TOTAL GENERATING CAPACITY.

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Washington DC – According to the latest issue of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) monthly "Energy Infrastructure Update" (released today with data through December 31, 2016), renewable energy dominated new U.S. electrical generation put into service during 2016.

Combined, newly installed capacity from renewable sources (i.e., biomass, geothermal, hydropower, solar, wind) totaled 16,124-MW or 61.5%, surpassing that from natural gas (8,689-MW), nuclear power (1,270-MW), oil (58-MW), and coal (45-MW) combined. **

This is the second year in a row in which the majority of new generating capacity came from renewable energy sources. In 2015, renewable sources added 12,400-MW of new generating capacity, or 64.8% of the total. Almost half of new capacity (49.6%) came from renewables in 2014.

During calendar year 2016, new wind generating capacity grew by 7,865-MW and was nearly matched by new solar generating capacity (7,748-MW). There was also 314-MW of new hydropower capacity and 197-MW of new biomass capacity; there was no new geothermal steam capacity added in 2016.

The rapid growth of renewables -- particularly solar and wind -- has resulted their seizing an ever-growing share of the nation's total generating capacity. Five years ago, renewable sources cumulatively accounted for 14.26% of total available installed generating capacity; now they provide almost one-fifth (19.17%): hydropower - 8.50%, wind - 6.92%, solar - 2.00%, biomass - 1.42%, and geothermal - 0.33%.

Each of the non-hydro renewables has grown during the past half-decade and their combined capacity (10.67%) is now greater than that of nuclear power (9.00%) and nearly three times that of oil (3.79%).

By comparison, the shares of the nation's energy capacity provided by oil, nuclear power, and coal have all declined. Today, oil's share is only 3.79%, nuclear power is 9.00%, and coal is 24.65% -- five years ago, they were 4.61%, 9.44%, and 29.91% respectively. Only natural gas has experienced modest growth and that is from 41.60% in 2011 to 43.23% today.

The greatest percentage increase of any energy source has been experienced by solar whose share of the nation's generating capacity (2.00%) is now nearly twelve times greater than in December 2011 (0.17%). Moreover, its growth is accelerating - new solar capacity in 2016 (7,748-MW) more than doubled that added in 2015 (3,521-MW). It now exceeds that of biomass and geothermal combined.

"The focus of the new Trump Administration on fossil fuels is not only environmentally irresponsible but totally wrong-headed in light of the latest FERC data," noted Ken Bossong, Executive Director of the SUN DAY Campaign. "Year-after-year, renewables are proving themselves to be the energy sources making America great again."

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The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission released its most recent 8-page "Energy Infrastructure Update," with data for calendar years 2015 and 2016, on February 1, 2017. See the tables titled "New Generation In-Service (New Build and Expansion)" and "Total Available Installed Generating Capacity" at: <https://www.ferc.gov/legal/staff-reports/2016/dec-energy-infrastructure.pdf> . FERC data for December 2011 can be found at: <https://www.ferc.gov/legal/staff-reports/12-11-energy-infrastructure.pdf>.

** Note that generating capacity is not the same as actual generation. Electrical production per MW of available capacity (i.e., capacity factor) for renewables is often lower than that for fossil fuels and nuclear power. As noted, the total installed operating generating capacity provided by renewables in 2016 is now 19.17% of the nation's total whereas actual electrical generation from renewables year-to-date (according to the latest U.S. Energy Information Administration figures) is roughly 15.2%. However, both of these figures understate renewables' actual contribution because neither EIA nor FERC fully accounts for all electricity generated by smaller-scale, distributed renewable energy sources. FERC's data, for example, is limited to plants with nameplate capacity of 1 MW or greater and thereby fails to include distributed sources such as rooftop solar.

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The SUN DAY Campaign is a non-profit research and educational organization founded in 1992 to aggressively promote sustainable energy technologies as cost-effective alternatives to nuclear power and fossil fuels.