

Production of electric energy

ଶ୍ରୀଶାର୍ଣ୍ଣିକୁଷାନୁଷାନ୍ତାଗ୍ରୀବ୍ରଦ୍ଧିକୁମାର

Introduction

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Energy is the ability to do work or cause changes in things. There are many forms of energy such as heat, light, electricity, moving air and water. Energy cannot be created or destroyed. It merely changes from one form to another.

In former times, if people wanted to transform any energy into mechanical energy, or useful work, they had to use an energy source like flowing water of a river to run a mill for example. Or they were dependent of the wind blowing in case of a windmill. In the case of steam engines, there was a need to supply fuel all the time to keep the machines going. The transport of the fuel, which was the energy source, wasn't easy and did also cost a lot of money.

This changed when people started producing electricity. Electricity is much easier to transport. If you're connected to a line, your energy problems are mostly solved, if the line is providing a stable electric voltage. So the energy may be produced at one place, for example at a river, and used in another, sometimes very remote place.

Electricity generation was first developed in the 1800's using Faradays dynamo generator. Nowadays, 200 years later, we are still using the same basic principles to generate electricity, only on a much larger scale. In the following chapters you will get a rough overview about production of electric power (you remember that power is equal to energy divided by time) and its transportation.

What ways of production of electrical energy do you know?

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Where do you think is the origin of the different energy forms?

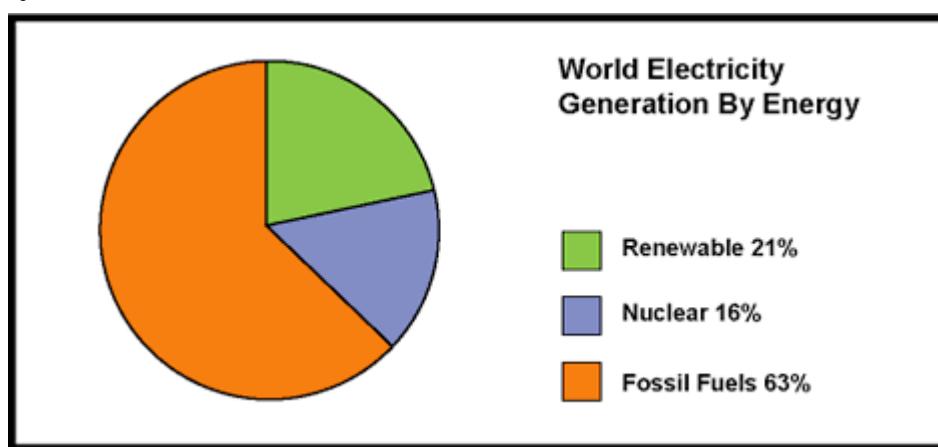
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Electricity generation is grouped in two ways depending on the source of energy being used: electricity from a non-renewable energy source, or electricity from renewable energy source. Electricity is a secondary energy source which means that we get it from the conversion of other sources of energy, like coal, natural gas, oil, nuclear power and other natural sources, which are called primary sources.

Most of the world's electricity is generated using **non-renewable** energy sources such as fossil fuels (coal, gas and oil) and radioactive substances such as uranium. Burning fossil fuels remains the easiest and most cost effective way of producing electricity. However, it does cause some damage to the environment.

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Generation of electricity using **renewable** energy sources is being widely researched to improve the technologies and make it cheaper. Hydro electricity provides 20 per cent of the worlds needs. Other renewable energy sources such as the sun, wind, geothermal, biomass, waves and tides are used to generate only a very small portion of the world's electricity.



The source of almost all energy forms (besides nuclear power, geothermal and tide) is the sun. E.g. the sun is the energy source for plants and animals. They have been transformed into oil after they died. This is a process which takes millions of years of course. The sun is also the reason for the wind that is blowing and that can be used for generating electric energy. The sun gives the energy for the water to evaporate from the sea, build clouds and come down as rain again in the mountains.

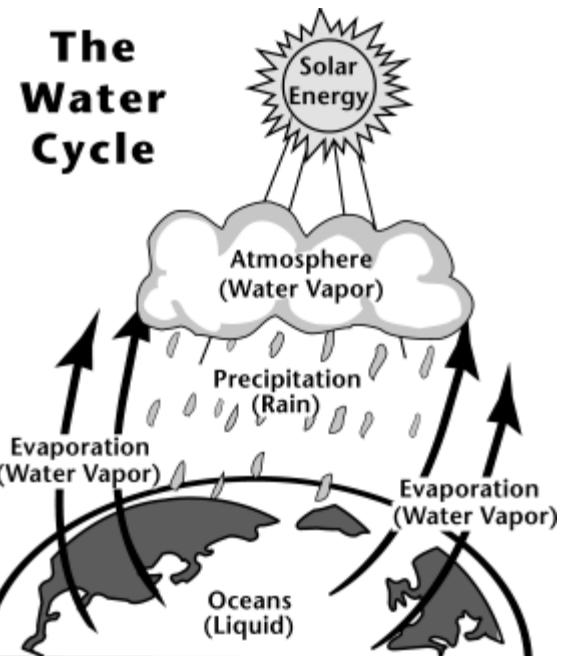
HYDROPOWER

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Of the renewable energy sources that generate electricity, hydropower is the most often used.

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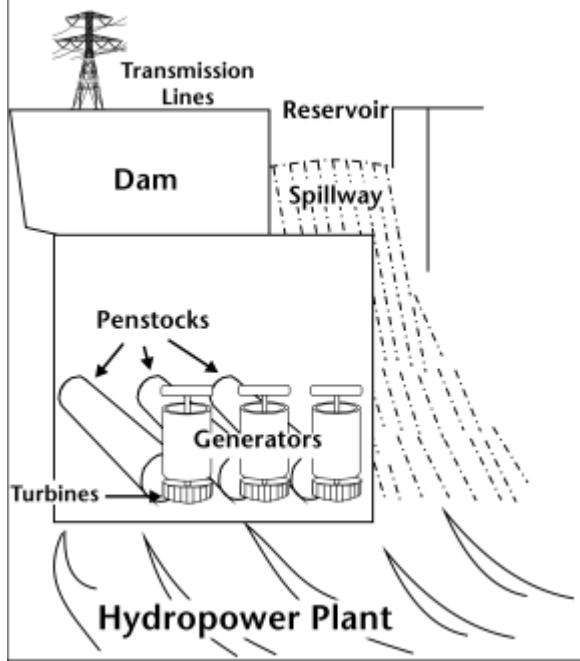
It is one of the oldest sources of energy and was used thousands of years ago to turn a paddle wheel for purposes such as grinding grain. The first industrial use of hydropower to generate electricity occurred in the 1880's. Because the source of hydropower is water, hydroelectric power plants must be located on a water source. Therefore, it wasn't until the technology to transmit electricity over long distances was developed that hydropower became widely used.



Understanding the water cycle is important to understand hydropower. In the water cycle solar energy heats water on the surface of the earth, causing it to evaporate. This

water vapour condenses into clouds and falls back onto the surface as precipitation. The water flows through rivers back into the oceans, here it can evaporate and begin the cycle over again.

Mechanical energy is derived by directing, harnessing, or channelling moving water. The amount of available energy in moving water is determined by its flow or fall. Swiftly flowing water in a big river carries a great deal of energy in its flow. So, too, with water descending rapidly from a very high point, like in a water fall. In either instance, the water flows through a pipe, or *penstock*, then pushes against and turns blades in a turbine to spin a generator to produce electricity. In a *run-of-the-river system*, the force of the current applies the needed pressure, while in a *storage system*, water is accumulated in reservoirs created by dams, then released when the demand for electricity is high.



Some people regard hydropower as the ideal fuel for electricity generation because, unlike the nonrenewable fuels used to generate electricity, it is almost free, there are no waste products, and hydropower does not pollute the water or the air. However, it is criticized because it does change the environment by affecting natural habitats. For instance, in some rivers, salmon must swim upstream to their spawning grounds to reproduce, but the series of dams gets in their way. Or whole valleys have to be put under water

because a new dam is built.

Nonrenewable energy sources

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steam and fuel

Steam-electric plants produce energy by using some form of heat energy to turn water into steam. The highly pressurized steam then travels through pipes to fan-like blades in a turbine. When the steam hits the turbine, it causes the blades to spin. The turbine begins to turn, causing giant wire coils inside the generator to turn. The generator then turns this mechanical energy into electricity. The steam will lose heat energy and be cooler after having passed the turbine. This difference of energy of the steam will be partly transformed into electric energy.

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In a steam-electric fossil-fired plant, some type of fossil fuel is burned to create the heat that is needed to produce steam. Fossil fuels include coal, oil (also called petroleum) and natural gas. The fossil fuels were formed millions of years ago from plants and animals that died and decomposed beneath tons of soil and rock.

A gas-fired turbine does not use steam. It works similar to a jet airplane engine. Natural gas is ignited and burned. The heat creates pressure that turns the turbine. These energy sources are called non-renewable. This is because once an oil field is exhausted or a coal mine contains no more coal, the oil or the coal will not form again. New fields and mines will have to be found.

The burning of the fuel is causing many negative impacts on the environment. It pollutes the air and part of the gases that are created at combustion are thought to be causing the earth's atmosphere to warm up and provoking a climate change (green house effect).

Renewable energy sources

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Solar energy

ଶ୍ରୀମଦ୍ଭଗବତ

Electricity can be produced directly from solar energy using photovoltaic devices or indirectly from steam generators using solar thermal collectors to heat a working fluid.

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Photovoltaic energy is the conversion of sunlight into electricity through a photovoltaic (PVs) cell, commonly called a solar cell. A photovoltaic cell is a nonmechanical device usually made from silicon alloys.

Sunlight is composed of photons, or particles of solar energy. These photons contain various amounts of energy corresponding to the different wavelengths of the solar spectrum. When photons strike a photovoltaic cell, they may be reflected, pass right through, or be absorbed. Only the absorbed photons provide energy to generate electricity. When enough sunlight (energy) is absorbed by the material (a semiconductor), electrons are dislodged from the material's atoms. Special treatment of the material surface during manufacturing makes the front surface of the cell more receptive to free electrons, so the electrons naturally migrate to the surface.

When the electrons leave their position, holes are formed. When many electrons, each carrying a negative charge, travel toward the front surface of the cell, the resulting

imbalance of charge between the cell's front and back surfaces creates a voltage potential like the negative and positive terminals of a battery. When the two surfaces are connected through an external load, electricity flows.

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The photovoltaic cell is the basic building block of a PV system. Individual cells can vary in size from about 1 cm (1/2 inch) to about 10 cm (4 inches) across. However, one cell only produces 1 or 2 watts, which isn't enough power for most applications. To increase power output, cells are electrically connected into a packaged weather-tight module. Modules can be further connected to form an array. The term array refers to the entire generating plant, whether it is made up of one or several thousand modules. As many modules as needed can be connected to form the array size (power output) needed.

The performance of a photovoltaic array is dependent upon sunlight. Climate conditions (e.g., clouds, fog) have a significant effect on the amount of solar energy received by a PV array and, in turn, its performance. Most current technology photovoltaic modules are about 10 percent efficient in converting sunlight. With further research this efficiency should be raised.

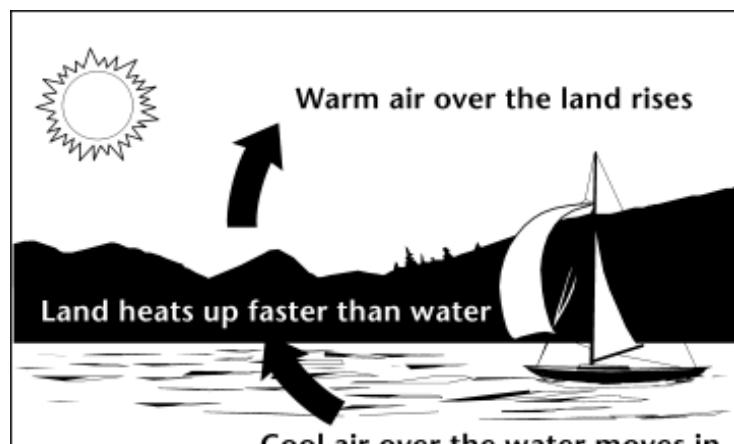
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Photovoltaic conversion is useful for several reasons. Conversion from sunlight to electricity is direct, so that bulky mechanical generator systems are unnecessary. The modular characteristic of photovoltaic energy allows arrays to be installed quickly and in any size required or allowed.

Also, the environmental impact of a photovoltaic system is minimal, requiring no water for system cooling and generating no by-products. Photovoltaic cells, like batteries, generate direct current (DC) which is generally used for small loads (electronic equipment). When DC from photovoltaic cells is used for commercial applications or sold to electric utilities using the electric grid, it must be converted to alternating current (AC) using inverters, solid state devices that convert DC power to AC.

The other way of producing electric energy out of the energy of the sunlight is called solar thermal power. Solar thermal power plants use the sun's rays to heat a fluid, from which heat transfer systems may be used to produce steam. The steam, in turn, is converted into mechanical energy in a turbine and into electricity from a conventional generator coupled to the turbine. Solar thermal power generation is essentially the same as conventional technologies except that in conventional technologies the energy source is from the stored energy in fossil fuels released by combustion.

wind



Wind is simply air in motion. It is caused by the uneven heating of the earth's surface by the sun. Since the earth's surface is made of very different types of land and water, it

absorbs the sun's heat at different rates.

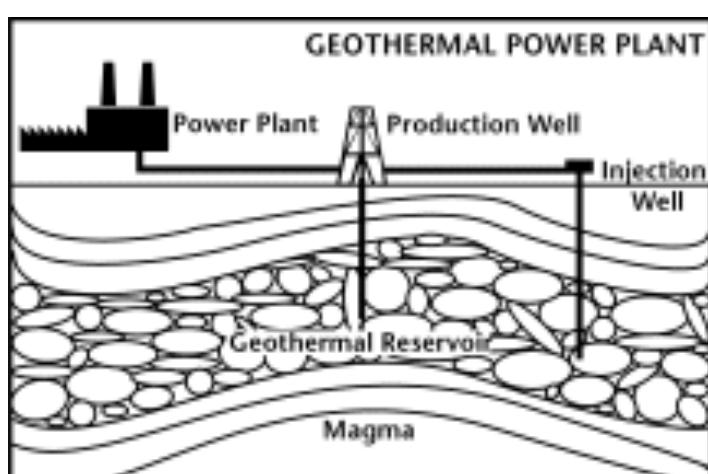
During the day, the air above the land heats up more quickly than the air over water. The warm air over the land expands and rises, and the heavier, cooler air rushes in to take its place, creating winds. At night, the winds are reversed because the air cools more rapidly over land than over water.

In the same way, large winds that circle the earth are created because the land near the earth's equator is heated more by the sun than the land near the North and South Poles.

Since ancient times, people have taken advantage of the energy of the wind. Over 5,000 years ago, the ancient Egyptians used wind to sail ships on the Nile River. The earliest known windmills were in Persia to grind wheat and other grains. At the 1920s, Americans used small windmills to generate electricity in rural areas without electric service.

Most of the so-called wind machines have blades like airplane propellers. These days, a typical wind machine stands as tall as a 20-story building and has three blades that span 60 meters across. Wind machines stand tall and wide to capture more wind. Like old fashioned windmills, today's wind machines use their blades to collect the wind's kinetic energy. Windmills work because they slow down the speed of the wind. The wind flows over the specially shaped blades causing lift, like the effect on airplane wings, causing them to turn. The blades are connected to a drive shaft that turns an electric generator to produce electricity. The wind is slower afterwards, and the energy it lost is partly transformed into electric energy. One wind machine can produce 1.5 to 4.0 million kilowatthours (kWh) of electricity a year. That is enough electricity for to power 150-400 homes. There is still the problem of what to do when the wind isn't blowing. At those times, other types of power plants must be used to make electricity.

Wind is a clean fuel. Wind farms, i.e. a lot of windmills at one place, produce no air or water pollution because no fuel is burned. The most serious environmental drawbacks to wind machines may be their negative effect on wild bird populations and the visual impact on the landscape. To some, the turning blades of windmills on the horizon are an eyesore. To others, they're a beautiful alternative to conventional power plants.



geothermal

You know that earth is much hotter inside than on its surface. This heat from the earth, called geothermal energy, can be collected. Usually, engineers try to collect it in the rare places where the Earth's crust has

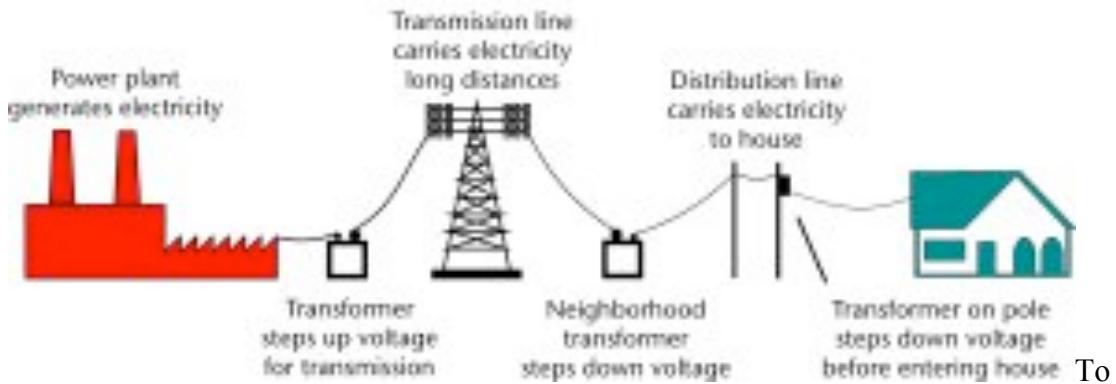
trapped steam and hot water. Here, they drill into the crust and allow the heat to escape, either as steam, or as very hot water. Pipes carry the hot water to a plant, where some of the steam is allowed to separate from the water. That steam then turns a turbine and an attached generator produces electricity. The water is cooler afterwards, a part of the heat energy it has given away is transformed into electric energy.

Geothermal energy was first used to produce electricity in Italy in 1903. Generation from geothermal sources is "site specific," meaning it's only possible in a few places under unique geologic conditions. Geothermal energy can be used as an efficient heat source in small end-use applications such as greenhouses, but the consumers have to be located close to the source of heat. The capital of Iceland, Reykjavik, is heated mostly by geothermal energy.

Geothermal energy has a major environmental benefit because it doesn't provoke air pollution that would have been produced if fossil fuels were the energy source. Geothermal energy has only a small impact on the soil, the few acres used look like a small industry building complex. Since the slightly cooler water is reinjected into the ground, there is only a minor impact, except if there is a natural geyser field close by. For this reason, for example tapping into the geothermal resources of Yellowstone National Park in the USA is prohibited by law.

Transportation

TRANSPORTING ELECTRICITY



solve the problem of sending electricity over long distances, George Westinghouse developed a device called a transformer. The transformer allowed electricity to be efficiently transmitted over long distances. This made it possible to supply electricity to homes and businesses located far from the electric generating plant.

The electricity produced by a generator travels along cables to a transformer, which changes electricity from low voltage to high voltage. Electricity can be moved long distances more efficiently using high voltage. Transmission lines are used to carry the electricity to a substation. Substations have transformers that change the high voltage electricity into lower voltage electricity. From the substation, distribution lines carry the electricity to homes, offices and factories, which require low voltage electricity.

Other environmental impacts

While generation of electricity from renewable energy sources may not produce greenhouse gases, it can still have effects upon the environment. Building large-scale hydro electricity generation plants alters the flow of natural river systems and changes landscapes through flooding. Solar, wind, wave, tidal, biomass and geothermal electricity generation plants all have considerable visual impacts on the environment. Electricity use around the world continues to increase with population increases. Current electricity production from renewable energy sources is unable to meet world demand. Therefore non-renewable energy is still used as the main source of electricity around the world.

Bioenergy

In order to provide heat, generate electricity and make fuels,. Biomass (organic matter) can be used. One of the largest sources of bioenergy, wood, has been used to provide heat for thousands of years. But there are many other types of biomass-such as wood, plants, residue from agriculture or forestry, and the organic component of municipal and industrial wastes-that can now be used as an energy source. Through the cultivation of energy crops, such as fast-growing trees and grasses,. known as bioenergy feedstocks many bioenergy resources are replenished

Biomass can be converted directly into liquid fuels for our transportation needs unlike other renewable energy sources, The two most common biofuels are ethanol and biodiesel. Ethanol, an alcohol, is made by fermenting any biomass high in carbohydrates, like corn, through a process similar to brewing beer. It is mostly used as a fuel additive to cut down a vehicle's carbon monoxide and other smog-causing emissions. Biodiesel, an ester, is made using vegetable oils, animal fats, algae, or even recycled cooking greases. It can be used as a diesel additive to reduce vehicle emissions or in its pure form to fuel a vehicle.

Heat can be used to chemically convert biomass into a fuel oil, which can be burned like petroleum to generate electricity. Biomass can also be burned directly to produce steam for electricity production or manufacturing processes. In a power plant, a turbine usually captures the steam, and a generator then converts it into electricity. In the lumber and paper industries, wood scraps are sometimes directly fed into boilers to produce steam for their manufacturing processes or to heat their buildings. Some coal-fired power plants use biomass as a supplementary energy source in high-efficiency boilers to significantly reduce emissions.

Even gas can be produced from biomass for generating electricity. Gasification systems use high temperatures to convert biomass into a gas (a mixture of hydrogen, carbon monoxide, and methane). The gas fuels a turbine, which is very much like a jet engine, only it turns an electric generator instead of propelling a jet. The decay of biomass in landfills also produces a gas-methane-that can be burned in a boiler to produce steam for electricity generation or for industrial processes.

New technology could lead to using biobased chemicals and materials to make products such as anti-freeze, plastics, and personal care items that are now made from petroleum. In some cases these products may be completely biodegradable. While

technology to bring biobased chemicals and materials to market is still under development, the potential benefit of these products is great.