



Winds of change

Philadelphia buys enough alternative energy to power City Hall for a year

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PENNSYLVANIA - The slow-spinning, 400-foot turbines visible from the Northeast Extension of the Turnpike don't exactly fit into the idyllic Poconos landscape near Exit 105.

But the six supersized machines of the Bear Creek Wind Farm are part of a growing clean energy push in the gusty mountain region of Northeast Pennsylvania. There are 54 turbines on three farms, including 43 at the Waymart Wind Farm.

"Each wind turbine produces enough electricity each year for 250 to 400 typical American homes," said Paul Copleman of Iberdrola Renewable Energies, which is partnered with Peco Wind Energy. "It's still a small percentage of how America generates electricity ... but we have over 36,000 Peco customers now using wind energy, including some large ones like the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University and some municipalities."

The biggest City Hall in America just added itself to that list.

During Earth Week last week, Mayor John Street announced the purchase of 8,500 megawatts of Peco Wind energy — enough to power City Hall for a year.

Wind energy, however, comes with a cost. Peco spokeswoman Cathy Engle said the city is paying \$20 more per megawatt, or \$170,000, for the year's supply.

Residential homeowners can elect to pay an additional \$7.62 a month for 300 kilowatts of the clean energy.

"It's been about three years and the Peco Wind program is now ranked in the top 10 fastest growing green power programs in the country," Engle said.

But there are only so many places suitable for the turbines. There are four wind farms in southeastern Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh and three farms in the Poconos. With growing demand, expansion of farms in South Jersey could be next.

The energy's cleanliness is worth the extra money, according to one Pennsylvania energy expert.

"Wind energy, both from the perspective of cutting air pollution and tackling global warming, is a critical part of our energy future," PennEnvironment clean air advocate Nathan Willcox said. "All the wind farms are helping to displace coal-fired power plants."