



Investing in Alternative Energy

If you are interested in alternative energy for your house, your first step should be to learn about the different systems, their benefits, and their costs. While investing in alternative energy has many benefits, it **is not** - in most cases - cheaper than relying on traditional energy sources. This is because most alternative energy systems require a significant up-front capital investment. If your motivation is to save money, focus first on energy efficiency and conservation. This is the goal of the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy: <http://www.aceee.org/consumer/consumer.htm>

But **investing in alternative energy is a great idea**. You can have a high quality, non-polluting, and renewable source of energy that can also be an invaluable resource in case of power outages. In the future, your energy may be a marketable entity that provides revenue. Finally, you will have the difficult to quantify but very real pleasure of joining a community of alternative energy users who are contributing to a cleaner environment and reducing global warming.

Here are some selected resources for alternative energy information. *This list is not comprehensive*, but will give you a starting point for your research.

- The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) is part of the U.S. Department of Energy's effort to secure an energy future for the nation that is environmentally and economically sustainable. <http://www.nrel.gov/learning/>
- The US Department of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy is "a gateway to hundreds of Web sites and thousands of online documents" <http://www.eere.energy.gov>

Installation information

- An overview of all types of alternative energy is at <http://www.thesolarguide.com/>
- If you are a hands-on type, "Home Power: The Hands-on Journal of Homemade Power" is for you: www.homepower.com
- If you aren't a do-it-yourselfer, there is a helpful overview of solar at the Chicago Solar Partnership website: <http://www.chicagosolarpartnership.com>

Contractors: For Chicago area companies that install turnkey systems, check the Internet and the Yellow Pages. Contractors are also listed at the Illinois Solar Energy Association's website, <http://www.illinoissolar.org/>

If you want to see installations on buildings and talk to users, there is an annual tour of Chicago area homes with solar installations, usually in October. Contact the ISEA.

Financing information

- The Illinois Renewable Energy Resources Program offers rebates in solar electric and wind power. The program must be reauthorized annually, check on the website under Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) at http://www.illinoisbiz.biz/dceo/Bureaus/Energy_Recycling/Energy/Clean+Energy/ for current status.
- Not-for-profit institutions installing alternative energy projects may be eligible for funding from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. (312)372-5191 or <http://www.illinoiscleanenergy.org/>
- If you install a system and have excess energy, you might be eligible to participate in Com Ed Wind and Photovoltaic Generation Pricing Program. Ask for Com Ed's Interconnection Guidelines for Photovoltaic and Wind Power Systems. Maryl Freestone is the Program Manager (630)437-2471.
- A comprehensive database of state, local, utility, and federal incentives that promote renewable energy and energy efficiency is at <http://www.dsireusa.org>. Click on Illinois.

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