Alternative energy systems

Top 5 Alternative Power Systems

A renewable energy system can be used to supply some or all of your electricity needs, using technologies like:

Energy-efficient homes and buildings use less energy to heat, cool, and run ...

This energy can be used to generate electricity or be stored in batteries or ...

Alternative energy isn"t so "alternative" anymore. It"s in the news, on political platforms, atop roofs and filling gas tanks, and the options have grown enough to change the conversation: It"s not whether we want it, but which kind we want.

Most of our current energy consumption draws on fossil fuels. These fuels aren"t renewable, and experts predict could they start running out as soon as 50 years from now. Plus, the combustion necessary to draw energy from fossil fuels releases vast amounts of pollution that lead to illness, ecological destruction and what"s turning out to be a nasty case of global climate change.

Ideally, alternative energy sources are low-polluters, are they"re renewable to varying degrees. The thing is, it"s not cheap to develop any energy system from the ground up on a large scale, so we need to focus: Which are the most promising options out there? Where should we put our money and our innovation muscle?

Here are five of the most promising sources of energy that could take us, eventually, away from our dependence on fossil fuels. No single source is perfect, but each is potentially a path toward clean, renewable power.

Geothermal energy is more sustainable than fossil fuels and gets high marks for efficiency, cost and environmental impact.

This type of energy production taps into the extremely high temperatures found deep within Earth"s crust, at the core. Temperatures there -- driven by natural, ongoing processes of radioactive decay -- are hotter than the surface of the sun, and we see signs of it in such geological formations as volcanoes, hot springs and geysers. To harness this heat -- sometimes as hot water, other times as steam -- we need only dig down deep enough in the right spot, where pockets of this geothermal energy are creeping to the surface. These wells provide taps into the Earth"s intense heat energy.

Once the steam or hot water is collected from the well, it"s easy enough to use it directly as a heating source or

to spin a turbine to generate electricity. Start-up and consumer costs are relatively low, but the potential for this type of energy production is very site-specific, limited to the "geothermal reservoirs" that dot the globe. In the United States, for instance, geothermal sites are mostly in the West, and California is the largest geothermal producer. One other caveat: This type of energy may not be strictly renewable, since we could potentially use this heat faster than the Earth can replenish it.

Sunlight, on the other hand, is a tough thing to deplete ...

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Web: https://kary.com.pl/contact-us/
Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com
WhatsApp: 8613816583346