

New Report: Wind Energy Yields Major Environmental and Public Health Benefits for Colorado

Half a Million Cars Worth of Pollution and a Billion Gallons of Water Saved Each Year

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DENVER — Wind energy in Colorado each year saves a billion gallons of water while avoiding emissions of air pollutants equivalent to that produced by half a million cars, according to a report released today by Environment Colorado. Between 2000 and 2011, production of electricity from wind energy in Colorado grew from zero to 4.7 million megawatt-hours (MWh), and is now producing nearly 10 percent of the state's electricity.

"The rapid growth of wind energy in Colorado is yielding huge benefits for the environment, our health and our increasingly scarce water supplies," said Jeanne Bassett, Senior Associate, Environment Colorado. "We need our state and national leaders to support policies that will keep us on track towards a cleaner energy future for Coloradans."

Environment Colorado today released the report, [*Cool Breeze: Less Pollution and More Water Savings from Wind Energy in Colorado*](#), during a press conference at National Jewish Health. In addition to the billion gallons of water saved, wind energy avoided emissions of more than 1,700 metric tons of smog-causing sulfur dioxide and 3,680 tons of nitrogen oxide, and more than 2.7 million metric tons of carbon dioxide.

Chris Urbina, MD, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE); John Stulp, Special Policy Advisor to the Governor for Water; and Alisa Koval, MD, pulmonologist at National Jewish Health, praised the environmental and public health benefits of wind energy highlighted in the report.

"Wind energy is a valuable renewable energy resource helping to provide cleaner and healthier air for the citizens of Colorado," said CDPHE Executive Director Dr. Urbina.

"The negative health effects of air pollution are well-documented, from eye, nose, throat, and breathing symptoms in healthy people to aggravation of existing respiratory and cardiac disease, especially in vulnerable populations of children and the elderly," said National Jewish Health pulmonologist Dr. Koval. "Reducing emissions of these air pollutants through the use of wind power and other alternative energy sources helps reduce the burden of these negative health effects."

Colorado could be on track to more than double wind power from 2011 levels in the next few years. According to the report, if wind development continues through 2016 at a pace comparable to that of recent years, then Colorado would reduce global warming pollution by an additional 2,329,022 metric tons in 2016—equivalent to the pollution produced by more than 450,000 passenger vehicles. These projects would also save nearly 900 million gallons of water, enough water to meet the annual water needs of nearly 20,000 people. It would avoid an additional 3,210 tons of smog-causing nitrogen oxide emissions and 1,480 tons of sulfur dioxide emissions.

"To be sure, wind power has provided major economic benefits for Colorado, including thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in benefits for our rural economy," said John Stulp, Special Policy Advisor to the Governor on Water. "Let's not dismiss the important environmental benefits. In this year of significant drought, the water savings are critical to our local environment and our economy."

Colorado's progress on wind has been aided by a strong state renewable energy standard -- requiring investor owned utilities to provide 30 percent of their power from renewable energy by 2020, and the federal renewable energy production tax credit (PTC). The PTC is scheduled to expire at the end of 2012, unless Congress takes action to extend it. Wind development is already faltering because of uncertainty about continuation of this important federal program. Wind development will slow to a crawl if Congress fails to extend the PTC.

“Wind power is improving the quality of life in Colorado,” said Jeanne Bassett of Environment Colorado. “This is an area that has strong bi-partisan support from across the state. But Congress must resist the efforts by the fossil fuel industry to block the progress of clean energy development and the benefits wind power development brings to our environment, public health and our economy.”

Contact Adam Dormuth for raw video of the press conference @ 303.398.1082 or dormutha@njhealth.org.

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Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

Jessica Berry
303.398.1082
berryj@njhealth.org

Sean Andersen-Vie
303.398.1002
andersenvies@njhealth.org