Three decades of renewable energy progress

Two years ago, only one state had committed to 100 percent clean energy. A year ago, there were two. As of this writing there are now six. More and more elected officials and business leaders are setting ambitious renewable energy goals, and the momentum is building. Here's a big-picture look at renewable energy's progress from Rob Sargent, senior director of our national network's 100% Renewable Energy campaign.

I've been campaigning to move America to clean energy for many years. When I started three decades ago, renewable energy wasn't even a blip on the radar screen.

There were no commercially produced hybrid cars—let alone plug-in electrics. The debates about energy efficiency revolved around whether to do it rather than how much needed to be done.

Back then, people would have laughed at the idea that America could meet its energy needs with 100 percent renewable energy. But, thankfully, we and others persisted.

Renewables are on the rise

Fast forward to 2019. Wind and solar are the fastest growing energy sources and have become “go-to” energy options for governments, corporations and institutions. Thousands of electric cars are coming off almost every manufacturer's assembly line. Energy efficiency is lauded as a sensible business practice and talk of zero-net-energy buildings has become commonplace.

Today, more businesses, schools, cities, counties and states than ever before have plans to meet their energy needs entirely with clean energy in the not-too-distant future. California, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, New Mexico, Washington, D.C., Washington state, Maine, and most recently, New York, have all set timelines for when they'll be powered 100 percent by clean energy sources.

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Rob Sargent visits the nation's first offshore wind farm near Block Island, R.I.
Leaders of our national network’s canvass team met in Baltimore before spreading across the country to build public support for putting wildlife over waste by banning single-use plastics.

New York, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut and Oregon all banned single-use plastic bags, joining California, which banned them in 2016. Maine also became the first state to ban single-use polystyrene foam containers, and Maryland became the second a month later. Bags and polystyrene are seldom recycled. Instead, they often end up in our rivers and oceans, where they never fully degrade and pose a threat to wildlife for years to come.

“Our Wildlife Over Waste campaign is based on the principle that nothing we use for a few minutes should pollute our environment for centuries,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s Conservation program. “When we started this year, it was only California. Now it’s a movement.”

Our network’s staff were instrumental in winning the California ban, and campaigned for the laws in Maine, Connecticut, Oregon and Maryland.

Six states in six months choose Wildlife Over Waste

In the first half of 2019 alone, six states took strong action to rein in plastic pollution. Moving forward, we’ll be working to make Massachusetts the next.

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“The first step toward powering our society entirely with renewable energy is to reduce the amount of energy we’re using, so it’s fitting that these bills are among the first energy legislation to advance this session,” said Environment Massachusetts State Director Ben Hellerstein. “If enacted, these policies will significantly reduce harmful pollution from the burning of fossil fuels, while reducing energy costs for people from all walks of life.”

We’re urging the Senate Ways and Means Committee to approve the bills so the full Senate can vote on them.

Bills promise greater energy efficiency for Mass. residents

Massachusetts has not one chance but four to vastly improve our energy efficiency.

Over the last week of June, the state Legislature’s Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy approved four bills that would reduce wasted energy, investigate how to increase the availability of energy efficiency programs to low-income households, and accelerate the adoption of clean heating technologies.

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The lobby day was sponsored by Environment Massachusetts, MASSPIRG Students, Resonant Energy, Vineyard Power and 350 Mass for a Better Future.

Millennials lobby for 100% renewable energy in Massachusetts

Millennials catch a lot of flack. But they might just be the generation to make the change we need.

On April 8, activists gathered at the State House for the first Millennials for 100% Renewable Energy Lobby Day and called on legislators to put Massachusetts on a path to 100 percent renewable by 2045. The leaders also announced the launch of the Millennials for 100% Renewable Energy Network, which will connect members of the generation in government, universities, nonprofits and the private sector to collaborate on clean energy solutions.

“As millennials, the way our society produces and consumes energy will affect our lives for decades to come,” said Ben Hellerstein, Environment Massachusetts state director. “The good news is that we have the power to do something about it.”

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There’s no time to waste
This progress has arrived not a moment too soon. It’s never been clearer that we need rapid transformation in how we use and produce energy.

Decades of dirty energy practices have polluted our air, water and land, changing our climate even faster than we thought. Across the country, we’re facing extreme weather, dirty air and water, and other challenges caused by a polluted planet—challenges that will only get more severe in the coming years.

It’s no wonder there’s widespread support behind the idea of fueling our society with abundant, pollution-free and renewable energy sources that have no fuel costs. What’s not to like about that?

How we got here
The progress we’ve seen so far didn’t happen by accident. In the decades that I’ve been doing this work, many of us have pushed for strong policies to ramp up renewable energy usage, create cleaner cars and build more efficient buildings and appliances.

Now, due to growing recognition of the environmental and economic benefits of clean energy, many companies, governments and institutions are leaning into 100 percent renewable energy targets and have concrete plans for achieving them.

We can’t change the past. But we can take stock of where we are today and forge ahead, guided by the reality of where we need to be in the future and what it will take to get there.

After years of slogging through the policy muck, I’m finally seeing the kind of progress that gives me confidence we can take clean energy to the next level. Let’s aim high. Please join us. The future of the planet is at stake.

By Rob Sargent, senior director, Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy

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To learn more about how renewable energy has grown in America, see “Renewables on the Rise,” a report by our national research partner Environment America Research & Policy Center. Read the report at: http://bit.ly/renewables-on-the-rise

Thank you so much for joining us as we work to make our state—and our world—a greener, healthier and more sustainable place for all of us to live in. In these pages, you’ll find the stories of the works you made possible to bring us closer to that goal.

So thank you once again for making it all possible with your action and support.

Ben Hellerstein
State Director
Some good news for bees: EPA bans 12 bee-killing pesticides

On May 20, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) canceled the registration of a dozen neonicotinoid-based pesticides known to harm bees—effectively banning them. The cancellation came as part of a settlement agreement the EPA reached in December in a lawsuit brought by the Center for Food Safety. While many forms of neonic pesticides will remain on the market, the settlement also requires the EPA to examine the effects of all neonics on endangered species.


Connecticut and Maryland have already restricted these pesticides, and we need other states to prohibit the most common and problematic uses of all neonics.”

To that end, our No Bees, No Food campaign is calling on the public to urge our state lawmakers to restrict bee-killing pesticides.

This summer, more than 123,000 members and supporters nationwide signed our petition calling for restrictions on bee-killing pesticides.