

## Energy Program Gives Michigan Alternative Solutions

*By: Kristen Brown,  
Research Assistant, Biosystems Engineering*



Conventional fuel may soon run out of gas, but for the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC), renewable energy has just started to fuel up.

Cars fueled by corn, homes heated by the sun and electricity produced by the wind are no longer science fiction, but real possibilities defining the future of energy.

These possibilities were discussed at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute on March 19 when the MPSC along with other Michigan-based renewable energy organizations came together. The day-long conference focused on renewable energy growth in the state and educational sessions for consumers.

“We are trying to raise the bar for energy efficiency,” Pat Hudson of the State Energy Office said to a near sold out crowd.

Hudson, along with Tom Stanton from the MPSC, delivered the “State of the State,” addressing Michigan’s energy update.

Hudson said new legislative activity has been stalled for quite some time.

“House and Senate Representatives can’t agree on (an update), therefore we do not have an energy policy,” he said.

Hudson urged consumers to contact House and Senate Representatives to encourage a renewable energy policy and make sure, as citizens, they are heard.

The MPSC, more than 130 years ago by Michigan legislation, strives to assure the public safe and reliable energy. The Commission has seen dramatic changes over the past decade and implementing the Michigan Renewable Energy Program (MREP) in 2002 has been a large step.

The program was established to “inform customers of the availability and value of using renewable energy generation and the potential for reduced pollution.”

MREP also hopes to promote the use of existing renewable energy, as well as encourage the development of new facilities.

“We import 96 percent of our oil. (Renewable energy) research will be very important,” Stanton said.

The renewable energy research is conducted by a collaboration of six MREP committees.

The Commission staff is responsible for submitting an annual report to Gov. Granholm. According to the MREP web site, the report is a way of assessing progress made by the program, to educating consumers and promoting the use of renewable energy.

“MREP is an open source,” Stanton said, urging people to participate in meetings.

Teleconferencing and web conferencing are even an option. Stanton said that all documents circulate for comments and input.

“We are trying to bring the state government into the modern age of telecommunications,” he added.

MREP is continually working with the state government to ensure these changes by recommending initiatives to advance renewable energy use.

These advancements are considered by some to be vital, especially with gas prices averaging \$2.15 in Michigan.

Conventional gasoline is a finite resource. According the Department of Energy information report, gas prices are not expected to lower anytime soon, mostly due to rising demand.

Currently, the DOE cites biomass fuel as accounting for three percent of the primary energy production in the U.S. Biomass technologies use plant materials to create energy. This has the potential to decrease dependency on oil and decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

Wind energy is another example of renewable energy. Wind energy is created when large turbines spun by wind generate electricity. Solar energy is also an option used for generating electricity, heating or cooling a building.

These are just a few of the technologies looked at by MREP committees. Tax incentives are offered to businesses using renewable energies.

Stanton said companies like Detroit Edison are looking at proposals for offering “green energy” to consumers. Hudson and Stanton urged people to search the web for MREP updates and tax incentive possibilities.

Further information on MREP and its progress can be accessed at [www.michigan.gov/mrep](http://www.michigan.gov/mrep).