

Ask the CHAIRMAN

Art Graham



Consumers have called the Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC) toll-free line and asked:

“As far as solar energy goes, why doesn’t the Sunshine State use more?”

Florida is doing better than some people say we are, but the Commission agrees our existing programs cost too much and accomplish too little. We’re revamping our solar strategy to succeed on a much larger scale, so as the price of photovoltaic panels continues to drop, we will cost-effectively achieve a major solar expansion.

Currently in Florida, renewable energy facilities provide approximately 1,617 MW of firm and non-firm generation capacity, which represents 2.8 percent of Florida’s overall generation capacity of 57,375 MW in 2013. Solar represents 218 MW, or 13.5 percent of our state’s renewable energy generation capacity.

Although we are known as the “Sunshine State,” climate poses a challenge, particularly in the amount of rainfall and cloud coverage Florida has.

In 2006, Florida started a rebate program for consumers installing solar panels, but ended it when demand exceeded funding. Some of Florida’s investor-owned utilities still offer some rebate programs, but funds are limited and are expected to expire in December 2015. The Commission will hold a workshop before 2015 ends to best determine how Florida could implement cost-effective solar programs. By having a public workshop on solar programs, we hope to develop options that are both feasible and cost-effective for customers.

Consumer confidence in generating and using renewables has continued to increase, according to electric utility reports filed with the PSC in 2014. Customer-owned renewable energy grew approximately 27 percent in 2013, to 6,697 systems, up from 5,302 in 2012. Statewide, electric generation capacity from these systems reached 63,055 kilowatts (kW), an approximate 49 percent increase since last year.

The PSC assisted this growth by establishing rules in 2007 that promote net metering—which gives the home or business the ability to gain credit for selling solar back to the grid. By making it easier for customers to interconnect their system with the utility’s grid, the PSC’s net metering rules encourage customer use of clean renewable generation that also lowers their utility bills. Since the first year of reporting, the number of renewable systems has increased more than eleven fold. When customers generate more energy than they use in a billing cycle, putting more electricity back into the grid than they took, the PSC’s net metering rules require electric utilities to credit the customer’s next bill at the full retail price.

*So, solar energy is being used by the utilities and their customers.
Also, the technology is getting better, making solar power easier to use.
Although we regularly use sunscreen here in Florida, we do love the sun!*