



Renewable energy sources facts

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Renewable energy is energy from sources that are naturally replenishing but flow-limited; renewable resources are virtually inexhaustible, but they are limited by the availability of the resources.

Until the mid-1800s, wood was the source of nearly all the nation's energy needs for heating, cooking, and lighting. From the late 1800s until today, fossil fuels--coal, petroleum, and natural gas--have been the primary sources of energy. Hydropower and wood were the most used renewable energy resources until the 1990s. Since then, U.S. energy consumption from biofuels, geothermal energy, solar energy, and wind energy have increased.

In 2023, renewable energy provided about 9%, or 8.2 quadrillion British thermal units (quads)—1 quadrillion is the number 1 followed by 15 zeros—of total U.S. energy consumption. The electric power sector accounted for about 39% of total U.S. renewable energy consumption in 2023, and about 21% of total U.S. electricity generation was from renewable energy sources.

Renewable energy can play an important role in U.S. energy security and in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Using renewable energy can help to reduce energy imports and fossil fuel use, the largest source of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions. According to projections in the Annual Energy Outlook 2023 Reference case, U.S. renewable energy consumption will continue to increase through 2050. The Reference case generally assumes that current laws and regulations that affect the energy sector, including laws that have end dates, remain unchanged throughout the projection period.

Last updated: September 13, 2024, with data from the Monthly Energy Review, April 2024, and the Annual Energy Outlook 2023, March 2023; data for 2022 are preliminary.

Renewable energy is energy derived from natural sources that are replenished at a higher rate than they are consumed. Sunlight and wind, for example, are such sources that are constantly being replenished. Renewable energy sources are plentiful and all around us.

Fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas - on the other hand, are non-renewable resources that take hundreds of millions of years to form. Fossil fuels, when burned to produce energy, cause harmful greenhouse gas emissions, such as carbon dioxide.

Generating renewable energy creates far lower emissions than burning fossil fuels. Transitioning from fossil fuels, which currently account for the lion's share of emissions, to renewable energy is key to addressing the climate crisis.

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